Al-Ahram Weekly

No345 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

2 - 8 October 1997 16 Pages P.T.75



El-Sadat, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8





photos: AP & Reuters

Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's family gather in front of the Gaza offices of the Red Cross, calling for his return to Gaza. Yassin, right, was released by the Israelis on Tuesday

Hamas leader gains freedom

ISRAEL released the ailing spiritual leader of Hamas from prison yesterday and sent him to Jordan in a reported exchange for two Israeli agents held in Amman.

The release of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin came a day after Jordan's King Hussein urged Israel to free the quadriplegic 61-year-old Hamas leader who had served eight years of a life term.

Israeli radio said Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan visited Israel secretly on Sunday to close the deal under which Yassin was freed in exchange for two Mossad agents held by Jordan following the attempted assassination last week of another Hamas leader, Khaled Masha'il, in Amman.

Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel refused to comment on Yassin's release and the reported swap. Jordan, however, denied it had agreed to release the two agents in return for the freeing of Yassin. Samir Mutawi, minister of state for information, said the two men arrested after the attack on Masha'il would be tried according to Jordanian law, regardless of the release of Yassin.

Hamas leaders, who initially condemned Yassin's exile to Jordan, welcomed the move after being assured by King Hussein that Yassin was free to return to his Gaza home any time he wished.

Speaking to reporters in Gaza by telephone from Amman, Yassin said: "We salute you and all the Palestinian people in the occupied land and, God willing, we will meet soon on our soil." The phone call took place during a Hamas news conference in Gaza City.

A Hamas political leader in Amman, Mousa Abu Marzook, said the group would continue its attacks on Israel. "We will resist occupation until it is removed," Abu Marzook, who was at Yassin's bedside, told the Gaza news conference by phone.

Abu Marzook was deported from the US to Jordan earlier this year after Israel dropped a request to try him for alleged involvement in plotting terror attacks in Israel. Hamas, responsible for more than a dozen suicide bombings in Israel since 1994, had frequently cited Yassin's detention as one of the reasons for the attacks.

Yassin was jailed by Israel in 1989 and was sentenced to life in prison for ordering the murders of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel. In prison, Yassin moderated his position, calling on his followers to end terrorist bombings in Israel.

Before daybreak yesterday, Yassin was rolled out of Israel's Ayalong Prison in a wheelchair, his body wrapped in blankets, and was put aboard a Jordanian helicopter that took him to Amman. (see p.4)

Israeli 'revisionism' triumphs

As the Israelis and Palestinians agree to revive their negotiations on Monday following a six-month stand-off, Graham Usher analyses the content of the agreement from Jerusalem, while Hoda Tewfik provides the view from New York

After a six month hiatus, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations will resume next week in an effort to repair the battered Oslo process. Following a meeting between Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy and PLO chief negotiator Mahmoud Abbas in Washington on 29 September, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that the two sides had committed themselves to a two-stage return to talks.

On 6 October, eight Palestinian-Israeli committees will be reactivated to discuss the 34 issues still pending from Oslo's interim agreement, including opening a Palestinian airport and harbour in Gaza and the establishment of a "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank. A week later, negotiators will return to Washington to address the "contentious" issues which divide them.

These, according to Albright, comprise "security cooperation and efforts to fight terror and its infrastructure"; further Israeli redeployments from the West Bank; and "the definition and content of a time-out regarding unilateral steps... for the duration of the permanent status negotiations". In both sets of talks, there will be American involvement, with US special envoy Dennis Ross arriving in the region next week to oversee the "interim" negotiations.

Israeli government officials said they were "satisfied" with the outcome of the meeting. With less enthusiasm, Albright said the return to negotiations was "a medium step" that had arrested the "downward spiral" in Palestinian-Israeli relations over recent months. The Palestinians were noncommittal. It is easy to see why.

For the Palestinian leadership, the cause of the crisis in the Oslo process is not only to do with the Israeli government's "unilateral actions," such as the decision to build a Jewish settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim last February, but is underwritten by the fear that Netanyahu wants to "change the direction" of the process. In this sense, the 29 September agreement marks a victory for Netanyahu's "revisionism" over the Palestinian and Arab attempts to defend Oslo's original terms.

Following the Hebron agreement, the PLO believed it had a clear timetable for further West Bank redeployments, underwritten by guarantees from then Secretary of State Warren Christopher. This stated that the three redeployments would proceed at six monthly intervals to be "completed no later than mid-1998", ahead of the close of the final status negotiations in May 1999. Last March, the PLO rejected Israel's first redeployment offer to transfer a further two per cent of the West Bank to Palestinian Authority (PA) control. In September, Israel unilaterally linked further redeployments to the PA's "fight against terror and its infrastructure."

Israel currently appears to favour either skipping all redeployments for the duration of "accelerated" final status talks or collapsing all three into one redeployment at a date to be set at Israel's discretion. This would mean the PLO negotiating a final accord from a territorial base of around 60 per cent of Gaza, but less than three per cent of the West Bank, a gravely weak position that, in the past, Yasser Arafat had always rejected.

With the 29 September agreement, however, the status of the further redeployments appears to have shifted from being an "American guarantee" to another "contentious issue" still to be negotiated. This was certainly Levy's spin on the meeting which, he said, provided a "basis to believe that the Palestinians will agree to postpone the further redeployments in Judea and Samaria."

A similar shift occurs with the phrase "time-out". For the Palestinians "time-out" means a freeze on all settlement construction and land confiscation for the course of the final status talks, as stated by Abbas on 29 September. But, as Albright pointed out in Washington, "this is not what (the agreement) says." The agreement says the Palestinians and Israel "will discuss the content of time-out".

Within 24 hours Netanyahu provided the content. Speaking to reporters in Jerusalem, he said that his understanding of "time-out" meant continued construction in existing settlements to "accommodate natural population growth", including, presumably, the 2,456 units currently being built for the Har Homa settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim and the 300 units at the Efrat settlement near Bethlehem announced by Netanyahu last week, but authorised by the previous Israeli government of Shimon Peres.

If this is truly Israel's understanding, it is difficult to see how the renewal of negotiations can avoid either another crisis or Palestinian submission to Israeli terms. Arafat's one hope appears to be that, having expended so much energy getting the talks restarted, the Americans will not allow them to be derailed.

The trilateral talks between Secretary of State Albright, Israel and the Palestinians resulted in an agreement to talk about talks and to negotiate about negotiations.

Albright was down to earth, describing her meeting with Levy and Abbas as being a small step forward.

Albright's statement included the confusing word "time-out." A subject of discussion at the 13 October meeting in the US will be "the definition and content of a time-out regarding unilateral steps," the accord said.

Diplomats attending the UN General Assembly in New York said the "formulation is meaningless" because it gave Israel the right to veto any attempt to define what a "time-out" should cover.

An Egyptian diplomat told *Al Ahram Weekly*: "There is no guarantee that Israel will not take provocative actions to kill the process, such as continuing to build on Palestinian land under the pretext of population growth."

An administration official told the *Weekly* "that Albright had already presented a list "in the region" of things that are perceived as provocative, that the Israelis might engage in, and Albright considers this a guideline for the kind of actions that we think the Israelis ought to refrain from."

Reacting to the statement by Netanyahu that he intends to continue settlement construction activity to accommodate normal population growth, the State Department spokesman said: "We haven't achieved agreement with the Israelis on this. We have stated what we think is helpful and what we think is not helpful, and we will continue to do that."

An Arab diplomat commented: "It seems that the administration is giving Netanyahu a way out under the pretext of population growth."

The State Department's spokesman James Rubin explained: "The time-out depends on what the environment is. In an environment in which the situation has deteriorated, small actions by one party could yield a great reaction by the other, but in an environment in which things are going well, specific actions may not yield the same kind of reaction."

While in New York, PA Minister Nabil Shaath told the *Weekly* the Palestinians will not compromise on the necessity that Israel implement its Oslo obligations. The final status talks cannot take place at the expense of Oslo, he said. Shaath added: "The formulation to overcome the current crisis should respond to both parties' needs: the Palestinians need their land, the Israelis need security, and we are committed to do this within the Oslo framework."

Arafat hopes

PALESTINIAN President Yasser Arafat held talks with President Hosni Mubarak in Alexandria yesterday to assess the latest US efforts to resume peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Arafat, ending a tour of Arab North African countries, said the Israeli government was challenging the whole world by refusing to implement agreements signed with the Palestinians, but added that he hoped the latest US mediation effort — including a visit to the region by US peace envoy Dennis Ross on October 6 and a high level meeting in Washington on October 12 between Israel and the Palestinians — will put the peace process back on track.

Litmus test

ALGERIA's Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) yesterday began a ceasefire which it claims will show that militants of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) are behind the terror campaign that has torn the country apart in recent months. The truce is widely seen as a litmus test of the ability of the AIS and its political wing, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), to deliver a solution to the current crisis. Just hours before the ceasefire started, Algerian newspapers reported nine civilians had been killed on Monday night in western Algeria, raising the death toll for the week to 100, of whom 60 were civilians and 40 rebels killed by government troops. (see p.4)

In memoriam

OCTOBER 1 marks the first anniversary of the death of Mohamed Shebl, film director, radio personality and for many years *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s film critic. Having left the diplomatic service, Mohamed achieved acclaim as the host of the European radio service's most popular early morning programme, which drew on his encyclopaedic knowledge of contemporary music.

Mohamed, who died at the age of 48, also directed four feature films and a large number of documentaries, including a mammoth, 14 hour documentary series on the life and work of Youssef Chahine, part of which was screened at last year's Locarno film festival under the title *Al-Muhakama* (The Trial).

An award, sponsored by the Friends of Mohamed Shebl, was founded following his tragically early death, and is presented annually to the best young film-maker of the year on the date of Mohamed's birthday.

Moussa denies kidnap claims

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa poured cold water on American allegations that Egyptian agents kidnapped a dissident Libyan diplomat



Mansour Al-Kekhia

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa has denied American allegations that Egypt was involved in the disappearance of Libyan dissident Mansour Al-Kekhia nearly four years ago.

Moussa, speaking to *Al Ahram Weekly*'s Washington correspondent, **Hoda Tewfik**, denied a report in the *Washington Post* alleging that Egyptian agents had turned Al-Kekhia over to the Libyan authorities. The *Post*, quoting a report by the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], claimed that Al-Kekhia, who disappeared in Cairo in December 1993, was subsequently killed in Libya.

"It is not possible that the Egyptian government or any Egyptian official was involved in turning Al-Kekhia over to Libyan authorities," Moussa said. "The Egyptian government does not get involved in things of this nature."

Moussa recalled that Egypt had opened an investigation into the disappearance of the Libyan dissident at the time. "If new information is available, however, the Egyptian government is prepared to open a fresh investigation," he said.

Moussa underlined Egypt's tradition of playing host to "refugees from all over the world, particularly from Arab and African countries. They all live safely in Egypt and none of them was ever subjected to any harm," he said.

Moussa cited a statement by Al-Kekhia's wife, Baha Omary, who expressed doubts about the credibility of the CIA report.

Omary, who is visiting Libya in search of evidence that her husband is still alive, told the Associated Press that US officials provided no evidence backing up the claim that Al-Kekhia was executed in Libya after being kidnapped.

"All they gave us was a small piece of paper torn from a fax machine," Omary said. "It wasn't sealed or dated, provided no names or details, nothing."

Al-Kekhia, who was Libya's foreign minister between 1973-1975 and UN ambassador between 1977-80, was visiting Cairo to attend an Arab human rights conference. He disappeared on 10 December, 1993, after being seen leaving his hotel with two men.

The CIA report presented to the Al-Kekhia family said that the agency had amassed conclusive evidence that he was kidnapped by Egyptian agents and handed over to Libyan officials in Cairo. He was then executed in Libya weeks later, the report said.

In Libya, Omary has met with Musa Kusa, Libya's intelligence chief. "He told me that Mansour is a friend... that they would never want to hurt him," she said.

Omary, a US citizen of Syrian origin, said she plans to leave by the end of the week but still hopes to meet Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. "Deep in my heart I believe he is alive... or maybe I want to believe that," she said.

The US State Department, broadly confirming the *Post* story, said on Tuesday it had credible information that Al-Kekhia was killed.

The Department's spokesman, James Rubin, said the US had taken an active interest in the case since Al-Kekhia's disappearance. "Since that time, the US has developed credible information that Mr Al-Kekhia was killed," he said.

A State Department official added that they had learned earlier this summer that Al-Kekhia was killed in 1994.

"When we developed that information, we communicated it to his family. And we raised it directly with the Egyptian government," Rubin said.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met Foreign Minister Moussa in New York on Monday but Rubin said he did not know to what extent they discussed Al-Kekhia.

"Secretary Albright and the administration are taking this case very seriously and intend to pursue it with all the relevant authorities until we get a satisfactory understanding of what might have happened," he added.

"Our bottom-line option is that anyone who is working with the Libyan government or the Libyan government itself needs to be held responsible for murders and abductions overseas. It's part of a pattern of terrorism that is unacceptable to the United States," he said. (see p.9)

INSIDE

'Peace more important than Azam'

Convicted Israeli spy Azam Azam occupied centre stage in President Mubarak's talks with Israeli President Ezer Weizman. **Nevine Khalil** reviews the results

President Hosni Mubarak, with Israeli President Ezer Weizman standing by his side in Alexandria, bluntly attacked representatives of the Israeli press and media on Sunday, telling them that if they had not sensationalised last year's arrest of Azam Azam, he would have been handed over quietly to the Israeli authorities.

Azam, an Israeli of Druze origin, was arrested four days before the opening of the third Middle East/North Africa economic conference in Cairo last November. After nearly 10 months of investigations and a trial by the Supreme State Security Court, Azam was found guilty of spying and sentenced to 15 years in prison. As the trial progressed, Mubarak repeatedly refused Israeli appeals to free Azam, insisting that the matter was in the hands of the Egyptian judiciary.

Although the Azam case occupied the greater portion of the two-hour long talks and lunch between Mubarak and Weizman, neither president had alluded to Azam in their opening statements.

When an Israeli reporter asked about the case, Weizman left it to Mubarak to answer. "The media uproar," Mubarak replied, "complicates the case and does not assist efforts to find a solution." Weizman would only say that he had discussed the case "extensively" with Mubarak.

Mubarak disclosed for the first time that 31 Israelis, arrested on charges ranging from the possession of arms or counterfeit currencies to photographing military installations, had been handed over to Tel Aviv in the past. "But the Azam case could not be dealt with in the same way after it had received such enormous publicity," he said.

Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif later explained that Mubarak "never issued, and will never issue, a pardon for individuals. Any pardon is based on legal considerations." Although the verdict against Azam cannot be appealed, it must be ratified either by the president or the prime minister, Kamal El-Ganzouri. A day after Weizman's visit, the state prosecutor sent the State Security Court's verdict to El-Ganzouri for ratification.

Mubarak went on to admonish the Israeli press for their focus on the spy case rather than the more important question of the peace process. "Is the Azam case more important than the Middle East peace process?" he asked, as he called on Israel's media to put a lid on reporting the case and turn their attention instead to finding ways of solving the impasse in the Middle East peace process.



Mubarak and Weizman discussed a number of bilateral and regional issues during their two-hour long talks in Alexandria this week

The two presidents also discussed problems recently faced by Egypt's ambassador to Tel Aviv, Mohamed Bassiouni. "Measures have been taken," Mubarak said, referring to the harassment of the Egyptian ambassador. "If it continues, Egypt will review the situation with the Israeli government." For his part, Weizman lavished praise on Bassiouni, who has served for more than 15 years in Israel, asking him to "keep [his] chin up" in the face of "some Israeli elements that might badger you".

Referring to the current deadlock in the peace process and continued Israeli settlement building on Arab lands, together with Israeli demands that Yasser Arafat crack down on Islamist militants, Mubarak said: "If we think we can wait to achieve absolute security and then begin to discuss peace, we are fooling ourselves. Real security is peace".

Hours before Israelis and Palestinians were due to meet with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in New York, the two presidents argued for more effective American mediation, saying that without US efforts it would be difficult to achieve progress in the peace process.

Weizman, whose post is largely ceremonial, was one of the architects of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and is generally considered a dove. On Sunday, however, he reiterated Netanyahu's own position that settlements currently under construction were "expansions" of existing settlements rather than new ones.

Israeli reporters posed the oft-repeated question to Egypt's president — would he visit Israel. Mubarak replied that a visit in itself was not a problem, but the timing had to be right. "A miscalculated visit could have a negative outcome," he said. Mubarak visited Israel for a few hours in 1995 to attend the funeral of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and, as vice-president, once went to Bersheeba with the late President Anwar El-Sadat.

Diplomacy replaces harassment

Egypt's ambassador to Israel, who had earlier complained of harassment, tells **Dina Ezzat** the situation has now improved

Mohamed Bassiouni, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, complained earlier this week of being subjected to harassment both by Israeli authorities and unknown individuals. But in a telephone interview on Tuesday, the ambassador said the harassment had stopped two days earlier.

"The situation has improved now," Bassiouni said. "Since I returned from the Alexandria meeting between President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli President Ezer Weizman [on Sunday], I have not suffered any harassment."

Earlier, Bassiouni said he received telephoned death threats from unknown individuals who swore at him and asked him to leave Israel. His wife and other members of the Egyptian diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv were similarly harassed.

The Egyptian diplomat also said that on his return from Egypt to Israel [before the Weizman visit], Israeli security agents searched his car for three hours, even though he told them repeatedly he had diplomatic immunity. "The way they searched the car was very insulting. I don't know what they were looking for but, of course, they didn't find anything."

Foreign Ministry sources suggested that the problems facing Bassiouni appeared to be due to the role Egypt is playing in support of Palestinian rights.

"Obviously Egypt is a regional power with a direct role in the peace process. Nobody should think that they can undermine this role under any pretext," Bassiouni commented.

Mohamed Bassiouni

The sources disclosed that Foreign Minister Amr Moussa personally contacted Israeli officials to express Cairo's anger at the way Bassiouni was treated. Egypt made it clear that it would not put up with these insults and would react, the sources said.

In an interview published by the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*, Bassiouni stated that if the Israelis "did not want me here, I am ready to leave right now. Whoever decided to harass me should know that he is playing a very dangerous game."

The Israeli Foreign Ministry issued a statement which vowed to investigate the ambassador's complaints and said that he was highly respected by the Israeli government.

"Obviously after the matter was brought up at the highest levels, during the meeting between presidents Mubarak and Weizman, the situation had to be contained, at least for the time being," Bassiouni said.

According to Bassiouni, he received further assurances from Israeli officials, following the Weizman visit, that he would not face any problems during his stay in Israel.

Bassiouni has been Egypt's ambassador in Israel for over 15 years. Finding a replacement would not be an easy task since few Egyptian diplomats are eager to serve in Israel.

Yediot Ahronot carried a front page photograph on Friday, showing Chief Rabbi Yisrael Lawu embracing Bassiouni and asking him not to leave.

"We will see what happens," said Bassiouni. "I hope the Israeli government will keep its promise and spare me any harassment in the future."

Bassiouni added that he wants to devote his efforts in the coming weeks to peace-making, and not to have to worry about such problems. But he warned: "If the problems recur, then we will have a different position."

Electing for reform

Changing the electoral system was the focus of a two-day conference held in Cairo last week. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended

Politicians, parliamentarians, intellectuals and human rights activists gathered at a two-day conference last week to highlight what they describe as the pressing need to introduce constitutional reforms to allow greater public freedom in Egypt. To drive the message home, the gathering seized upon the Universal Declaration on Democracy issued in Cairo last month at a conference of the International Parliamentary Union [IPU]. This declaration stated, in clear-cut terms, that free and fair elections were the key to democracy. To ensure the integrity of elections, the declaration said, the rights of freedom of expression and assembly, access to information, political activity and the right to establish political parties, should be guaranteed.

Last week's gathering was organised by the Group for Democratic Development, a US-funded non-governmental organisation, under the title "Reform of the Egyptian Electoral System." Delegates at the meeting, who described the IPU declaration as a landmark achievement, urged the government to cooperate with political parties and civic groups by taking concrete steps to expand the scope of people's participation in politics.

Conference chairman, Yehia El-Gamal, a professor of constitutional law, said the meeting focused on two principal subjects. The first, he said, was the need to pass a new law on the exercise of political rights to meet the criteria for the integrity of elections contained in the declaration. The second main item on the agenda was the need to introduce constitutional reform to enlarge the scope of freedom of expression by means of establishing political parties and exercising political activity.

Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed, a professor of political science, argued that enlarging the scope of people's participation in politics did not seem to be one of the government's priorities. "It is true that the government every now and then announces support for greater political participation," he told the conference. "But it is equally true that the government has placed obstacles along the way."

El-Sayed cited legislation that ended the long-time practice of filling the posts of village mayors and deans of university faculties by election. He also alluded to parliament's approval of a three-year extension of the emergency law, which has been in force since the assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981.

According to Hisham Raouf, head of the Southern Cairo Court, the 1956 law on the exercise of political rights, popularly known as the elections law, needs to be amended. Raouf said that the last parliamentary elections, held in 1995, were not under the full supervision of the judiciary as stipulated by the constitution. He was supported by Tharwat Mahgoub, chairman of the Administrative Prosecution Authority, who said the judiciary supervised about 15 per cent of the election process, while the remaining 85 per cent was supervised by civil servants.

Fahmi Howeidi, a writer on Islamic affairs, asserting that the "existence of an active civic society is essential for democracy," criticised the failure of the state-controlled media and education systems to disseminate a culture of political pluralism.

Debate at the conference heated up when Mohamed Fayek, chairman of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, claimed that the government has been acting to restrict rather than promote political participation. Fayek argued that the elections law favoured the ruling National Democratic Party [NDP] by placing parliamentary elections under the supervision of the Interior Ministry, instead of the judiciary.

Back at the People's Assembly, leading NDP figures took the conference's discussions and recommendations in their stride, insisting that there was nothing wrong with democracy in Egypt. Ahmed Abu-Zeid, the NDP majority leader, said the declaration issued by the IPU reflected the government's belief in the basic ideals of democracy. "It is not a secret that we seized upon the opportunity of the IPU conference to project the democratic climate of Egypt among world parliamentarians," Abu-Zeid said. "But it was deplorable that some opposition parties tried to score political points from the IPU conference."

According to Abu-Zied, most of the recommendations passed by the conference on reforming the electoral system were the subject of debate at a national dialogue conference held in June 1994, with the aim of reaching a national consensus on political and socio-economic issues. "There was a consensus at the national dialogue that amending the constitution is not a priority during a period in which Egypt is facing internal and external dangers," he said.

Salah El-Taroti, chairman of the Assembly's information committee, conceded that there was a time when opposition figures were barred from the media but, he said, this has changed. "Opposition leaders from the Wafd and Tagammu parties are regular guests on television channels now, appearing on many political programmes," he said.

El-Taroti rejected the question marks raised by the opposition over the integrity of the elections. "The opposition believes that the electoral system favours the ruling party, but the truth is that opposition parties are isolated," he said. "They boycotted the 1990 elections and this was a grave mistake. Between 1990 and 1995, leftist ideology suffered a major setback and the government adopted liberal market-oriented policies. As a result, opposition parties, particularly the leftist Tagammu and the liberal Wafd, found that they did not have anything new to offer to the people. They lost the elections and then claimed that the elections were rigged."

Ahmed El-Messalamani, a researcher with the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said another national dialogue conference was needed. Elections should be placed under the full supervision of the judiciary and parliament should be granted greater powers, he added. "None of these steps requires the government to make a fundamental change, but they would gradually and definitely improve the prospects of democratisation."

Pyramids drowning in urban sprawl

Work on a scheme for protecting the 4,500-year-old Giza Plateau, home to the Pyramids and the Sphinx, has been stalled by Cairo's seemingly endless ability to grow. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** assesses the progress of the scheme, or lack thereof

As the second phase of an ambitious project for revamping the Giza Plateau neared completion, work was blocked by urban developments which the plan's architects had failed to take into account. Ironically, the necessary financing had been made available only a few days earlier.

In the words of Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, the four-year project, which began in 1995, aims to preserve what is left of the plateau before it is too late. The $12 million plan includes the construction of a two-metre-high wall to protect the Sphinx from the growth of the neighbouring village, Nazlet El-Semman. The village itself will be left untouched. The scheme also aims to dismantle storage buildings and resthouses used by archaeologists, banish motorised traffic from the area and build a pedestrian road for visitors. This road would be lined with three cultural centres: the first near the Mena House Hotel, the second at the foot of the Sphinx and the third at the road's intersection with the Fayoum highway.

But the plan to build a pedestrian road had to be stopped, even before it began, because surveyors found that its route was blocked by several urban constructions. Whether these encroachments can be dismantled is an open question.

Ali Hassan, who has just completed a one-year term as head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said: "The plan prepared by the Archaeology Engineering Centre [AEC] of Cairo University was impractical because the envisaged route is blocked by several encroachments, including a hospital, a school and parts of the Sound and Light Company. It is next to impossible to remove them all," he said.

Hassan blamed the archaeologists working in the area "because they did not draw the attention of AEC engineers to the existence of these encroachments. But it is also the fault of the engineers who were confronted by these problems and yet did not take them into account while charting the route," he said.

If these obstacles cannot be removed, alternative sites for the planned route will have to be suggested by the AEC, Hassan said.

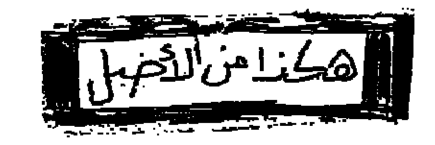
AEC officials said that administrative orders had been issued for the removal of some of the constructions and this was taken into account while preparing their plan. The other encroachments occurred after the plan was finalised, they said.

Hassan Fahmi, head of the AEC, said the Centre was searching for an alternative to the planned route. But he defended the scheme, declaring it had the full support of the minister of culture.

Earlier this year a group of activists initiated legal action, seeking an injunction from an administrative court to stop the project. They argued that the plan was a glaring violation of article 20 of a 1983 antiquities law which states that each archaeological site should have a 3km square reserve around it. The law also prohibits any change of the site's nature. The court threw out the case on the grounds that it was beyond its jurisdiction.

Zahi Hawass, the Giza Plateau director, played down the importance of the current standstill, which he described as temporary. He said that "any project usually faces some administrative problems, but this does not mean that it has stopped completely."

Hawass said the second phase was nearing completion after the three Pyramids underwent restoration and several encroachments were removed. "The third phase is due to begin in December. By that time, all the administrative problems should have been sorted out," he said.



'Israeli actions will lead to catastrophe'

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa delivered Egypt's speech to the UN General Assembly on Monday. **Hoda Tewfik** provides the highlights from New York; **Dina Ezzat** an analysis from Cairo

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa held the government of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu responsible for the deterioration in the Middle East peace process, warning that its policies would lead to catastrophe.

In a speech before the UN General Assembly on Monday, Moussa said that Israeli actions, such as settlement activities and its reneging on earlier agreements, gave rise to frustration, resulting in "violence, destruction and suicide."

Moussa's words appeared to be directed not only at the Assembly and Israel but also to the US, which has resumed an active mediatory role between the Arabs and Israel. As he spoke, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was meeting with Palestinian and Israeli officials in an attempt to persuade the two sides to resume their stalled negotiations on 6 October.

Albright also met with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara'a. But there was no announcement that Syrian-Israeli peace talks, frozen for a year and a half, would be revived.

"The peace process faces a serious crisis," Moussa said. "The most apparent manifestation of this crisis is that the concept, principles and bases of the peace drive are being completely... squandered. The vision, spawned in peoples' minds, of the sort of peace agreed upon by the UN and in Madrid started to erode. Trust has been replaced by doubt, hope by despair, and aspirations to a future where justice and peace will prevail by frustration."

Moussa went on: "Alas, confidence was lost, credibility was shaken and the peace process lost momentum. For this, and for the current serious situation, Israeli government policy is to blame. This regrettable situation is the outcome of Israeli policies such as the settlement activities, its reneging on agreements and commitments reached making a mockery of legal accords, challenging the two co-sponsors of the peace process in an unprecedented manner and pushing things towards confrontation... All these give rise to frustration... resulting in violence, destruction and suicide. This will lead to catastrophes... the responsibility for which, we hasten to underline, now and before you, must be fully assumed by current Israeli policies."

Moussa said Arab foreign ministers, at an Arab League conference in Cairo last week, reached a unified position to deal with "this serious crisis." This Arab position is based on: rejection of Israeli government policies designed to undermine the peace process; upholding just and comprehensive peace as a strategic option and objective on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the land-for-peace principle; and holding the Israeli government responsible for backtracking on previously-reached commitments and agreements.

The Arab position, Moussa said, calls for a resumption of negotiations on three bilateral tracks. Negotiations should be resumed on the Syrian track "from wherever they ended," with the two parties showing commitment to "what has already been achieved." As for the Lebanese track, negotiations should centre upon the implementation of Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

On the Palestinian track, Moussa said, negotiations should be resumed "on the basis of implementing the agreements reached, including the commitments of the interim period. Parallel to that, negotiations on permanent status should start in order to lead the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish an independent state."

Urging that Israel be pressurised to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT], Moussa said: "Stable and just peace must be built on a strong basis of comprehensive security arrangements that cater to the apprehensions, concerns and viewpoints of all parties. This can only take effect once Israel accedes to the NPT, being the only state in the region that has not yet done so. Consequently, I call upon the General Assembly and the NPT depositories to take the necessary steps to ensure Israel's accession to the NPT and the prompt undertaking of serious negotiations to establish a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East..."

On the proposed expansion of the UN Security Council, Moussa said: "Election of new permanent members to the Security Council must be subject to objective international and regional criteria through which it will be possible to select the states that can handle the responsibility of permanent membership in the Council."

UN must reflect the real world

Ways to maximise the benefits of a UN reform plan and the need to solve the critical problems of the Middle East were the two main points in Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's speech to the UN General Assembly last Monday. Although Moussa dealt with the two points at length, he seemed to be conveying one message: the weak and the poor should not be marginalised if the earth is to become a better place to inhabit.

Moussa asserted that UN reform must not be at the expense of the important developmental role which the world organisation should play in combating the proliferation of poverty. He affirmed that should UN staff be laid off in order to cut costs, geographic representation should be taken into account.

"The continuous and sharp decrease in resources allocated for developmental purposes, in addition to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of some countries to honour their financial commitments, has had a negative impact on a number of programmes," Moussa said. "The funding of UN developmental activities should be reconsidered in order to ensure their efficiency."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposed initiative, covering the organisation and management of the Secretariat, programmes and funds, contains the most extensive and far-reaching reforms in the 52-year history of the organisation.

According to diplomatic sources, Egypt supports the idea of reform generally but has serious concerns that talk of budget cuts will automatically mean less UN support for poorer countries which face serious economic problems.

"For Egypt, reform is not focused on cutting expenditures; it is an overall process of development," a source said. He added that Egypt found it difficult, for example, to accept cuts to the UN Development Programme's budget at a time when some affluent countries have failed to pay their financial dues to the UN.

The secretary-general's initiative is based on making at least $200 million available for development activities in the years 2002-2003 from savings obtained from the regular budget by reducing administrative and overhead costs in the UN Secretariat.

"Talking about administrative and overhead costs is too general," an Egyptian diplomatic source said. "It could mean integrating two UN development programmes into one under the pretext of cutting costs but in a way that will also undermine their efficiency as anti-poverty bodies."

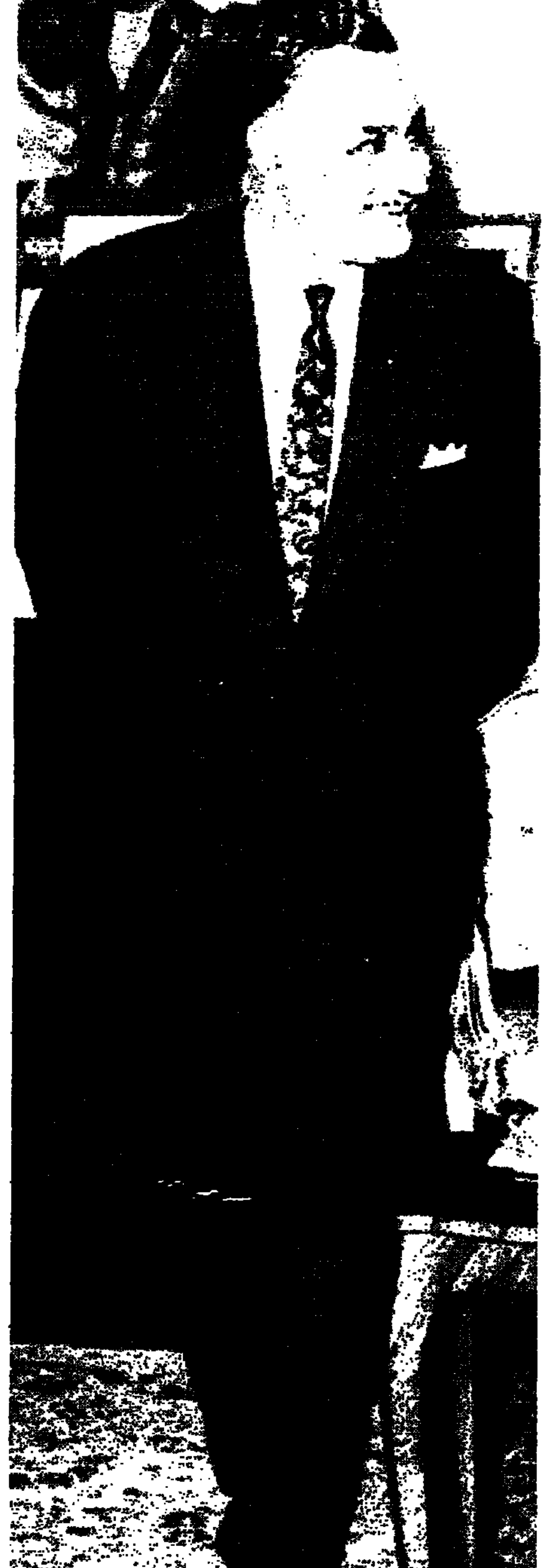
The source added: "There is also another important question: would the laid-off employees be mostly from the poorer countries?"

Further affirming the importance of equity between developed and developing countries, Moussa said that all world groupings should be represented in an expanded UN Security Council. He underlined the "necessity for consensus" on the expansion plan.

A proposal was made earlier this year to add five more permanent seats to the Council — one for Japan, Germany, Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Egyptian position is that Africa, Asia and Latin America should be assigned two seats that could be occupied by countries within each geographical grouping by rotation.

At present, the five permanent seats at the Council are held by the US, Russia, Britain, France and China.

Moussa advocated that Egypt, due to its regional and international roles, is qualified to occupy one of the new permanent seats, provided that this has the approval of African countries.



A DATE WITH HISTORY: Only a week separates two seminal events in Egypt's modern history. On 28 September Egypt observed the anniversary of the death of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose 1952 Revolution changed the face of Egypt and the entire Middle East. Internationally, Nasser championed the cause of the Third World during the era of decolonisation and regionally promoted the pan-Arab cause. Domestically he adopted a programme of massive social reform in an attempt to improve the lot of the disenfranchised.



The 24th anniversary of the 1973 War when, under President Anwar Sadat's leadership, the myth of Israel's military invincibility was finally destroyed, falls just a week later. On 6 October Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal, restoring a sense of confidence that had been shattered by the June 1967 defeat. Following the war, Sadat engineered a rapprochement with the West, pursued peace with Israel, and opened up the Egyptian economy. Ironically, it was on 6 October, 1981, while reviewing a military parade to commemorate the anniversary of the October War, that Sadat was assassinated.

Mental care gets LE40 million shake up

In an attempt to improve discipline and medical care, mental hospitals will be run by the Health Ministry instead of municipal councils, reports **Mona El-Nahhas**

After investigation into the 18 September bombing of a tourist bus revealed wide-scale corruption in mental hospitals, President Hosni Mubarak ordered that these hospitals should be supervised by the Ministry of Health instead of local councils. The presidential decree covered all five government-run hospitals: El-Abbasiya, El-Khanka, Helwan, Heliopolis and Ma'amoura, in Alexandria, which house more than 8,000 patients.

The objective, according to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, is to upgrade medical care and achieve a higher degree of discipline.

Health Minister Ismail Sallam immediately vowed to introduce a series of far reaching reforms while leading psychiatrists welcomed the switch, expressing confidence that it would improve conditions. The presidential decree was issued after Saber Farahat, a patient-convict at El-Khanka Hospital, managed to escape and attack a tourist bus outside the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, killing nine German tourists and the Egyptian driver. Farahat, who was apprehended at the scene of the crime, told investigators he used to bribe the hospital's management and staff to obtain lengthy leaves of absence.

The investigation showed that Farahat was not the only patient-convict who was allowed to leave the hospital. Others with police records were allowed home leave, providing them with the opportunity to engage in illegal activities.

The investigation also showed that the majority of government-run mental hospitals lacked adequate security. The medical services extended to patients were described as modest owing to a shortage of medical staff. Incidents of torture or abuse of patients were also reported. The health minister pledged that these conditions would be rectified. The results should begin to be felt in three months, he said.

Sallam's plans call for a reshuffle of the hospitals' management and staff to guarantee that the "right person is in the right place." The five hospitals will have a technical secretariat-general which will determine the roles of all workers, including doctors, nurses and others. New security systems will be installed and the first school for graduating female nurses, specialised in caring for mental patients, will be established.

These are only the first part of a larger LE40 million plan to upgrade the hospitals, Sallam said. The cabinet has agreed to allocate the necessary financing, he added.

Dr Ahmed Okasha, a professor of psychiatry, welcomed the plan and said that once put into effect, it would mark a turning-point in the field of government-run psychiatric treatment. He said that it was wrong from the very beginning to attach these hospitals to municipal councils which have nothing to do with psychiatry.

Dr Yehia El-Rakhawi, another psychiatrist, suggested additional measures, including weekly or monthly inspections at these hospitals. "Work regulations, security, visiting hours and leave permits need to be completely reconsidered," he said.

No consensus on freedom of expression

Is the judiciary adopting a more liberal stand in opposing the attempts of Islamist activists to muzzle freedom of expression? Two recent court pronouncements have led to mixed reactions

As the legal battle waged by Islamist activists to restrict freedom of expression drags on, some human rights activists claim that two recent court man rights activists claim that two recent court rulings signal the emergence of a new, liberal trend on the part of the judiciary, reports Dina Ezzat. Others disagreed. The first pronouncement denounced the practice of female genital mutilation as un-Islamic while the second revoked the confiscation of a book which had been condemned by Islamists as offensive to religion.

The book, *Rab El-Zaman* (The God of All Times), by Sayed El-Qemni, was originally proscribed at the recommendation of Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy on the grounds that it insulted a companion of the Prophet Mohamed. But a removal of the ban was ordered last month by a first instance court.

Another first instance court turned down a request for financial compensation made by an Egyptian lawyer against Cable News Network [CNN]. The lawyer claimed that a CNN programme which showed an 11-year-old girl undergoing the practice of genital mutilation insulted all Egyptians. During the hearing the judge seized the opportunity to denounce the practice as un-Islamic and unhealthy.

Yet human rights activists are divided over whether the two pronouncements signal the emergence of a new trend among the judiciary.

"I believe there is a trend among a new generation of judges who are attempting to use every opportunity to defend public freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression," commented Mona Zulficar, a lawyer and women's rights activist. She said the two judges had displayed "exceptional bravery" in making these pronouncements because "they went against the general trend within society. Despite all the efforts made to uphold freedom of expression and other civil liberties, the prevailing trend is to confine religion within the strait-jacket of conservative interpretation," she added.

Indeed, the court's decision to revoke the confiscation of El-Qemni's book was welcomed by many newspapers and intellectuals as a victory. "In his pronouncement the judge drew a distinction between the right to conduct scientific research, which he upheld, and deliberate attempts to insult revealed religion," said Zulficar. In the CNN case, she argued, the judge could have simply handed down his decision without addressing the issue of female genital mutilation.

In another development, a state commissioners' committee — an advisory body to administrative courts — submitted a report upholding the health minister's legal power to banish the practice from public, as well as private hospitals, and clinics. The report, which is not binding, is designed to assist the judge in reaching a decision on a ministerial decree which a lower court had suspended on a legal technicality.

"It is very difficult to ignore the fact that these three developments took place within the space of three weeks," Zulfickar stressed.

But other civil activists were less enthusiastic. "I do not agree that things are changing," said Hisham Mubarak, director of the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid. He argued that the judiciary is an integral part of society and so one should not be surprised that it reflects the conservative-secularist confrontation that afflicts society. The most Mubarak would say was that "this year has witnessed a limited and very preliminary step towards a less restrictive interpretation of religion."

He cited the cases of Nasr Abu-Zeid, a Cairo University professor condemned as an apostate, and Youssef Chahine's film *The Emigrant*, which was briefly banned by a court order that was later revoked: "Both cases had to go up to different judicial levels. Each time, each judge quoted the same laws but reached a different decision, either for or against the two men," Mubarak said.

Surprisingly, the same view was shared by some conservatives and Islamists. Sheikh Youssef El-Badri, who has been waging a relentless battle to muzzle freedom of expression, thinks that "there is no such thing as a trend towards liberalism among judges. What we have are preliminary verdicts by lower courts which have a long way to go before they are finalised," he said. El-Badri referred to the case of Abu-Zeid, who was exonerated by lower courts but eventually condemned by higher courts.

For Khalil Abdel-Karim, an Islamist lawyer with leftist leanings, "the judges have to follow the law. If the law is reactionary in spirit, the judges should not be blamed for the decisions they hand down." He recommended the abolition of all legal provisions that empower the Islamic Research Academy or art censors to act as arbitrators over freedom of expression.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Parallel paths between PA and Hamas

The Palestinian Authority cracked down against Hamas militants after Israel said the resistance group was responsible for two recent suicide bombings. **Graham Usher** met Hamas leader Abdel-Aziz Rantisi to assess the effect of the move

"When Mr Arafat kissed me, it was a routine kiss, not a political kiss," said Hamas's political leader in Gaza, Abdel-Aziz Rantisi, smiling.

Rantisi was referring to the now famous photograph that captured him being embraced by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at a Palestinian "National Unity" conference in Gaza last month. Beamed across the airwaves, the image has since been used by Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu as evidence that Arafat is more interested in "embracing terrorism" than "fighting" it.

It is unlikely that there will be more kisses. Last week — following Israel's alleged identification of four of the five bombers responsible for the two suicide attacks in Jerusalem in July and September — the Palestinian Authority (PA) arrested about 70 Palestinians on suspicion of being Hamas activists in the self-rule areas and closed down 20 Islamist institutions.

Most of the latter are charitable Islamic organisations located in Gaza that provide services ranging from kindergartens to alms payments to needy Palestinians. One Palestinian specialist in NGOs estimates that altogether the organisations service "at least 7,000 families", which, given the average family size in Gaza, means about 50,000 people. With unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip at 35 per cent "at a minimum" due to Israel's closure policies, the general view is that the closures will hurt poor Palestinians far more than Hamas's military arm, Izzadin Qassam.

This is a line echoed by Rantisi. "In shutting down the institutions, the PA is not destroying the infrastructure of Hamas. It is destroying the infrastructure of the Palestinian people," he said and went on to add, "For sure, the closures will affect Hamas as a social movement, but it is the PA who will lose in the court of Palestinian public opinion." Palestinian human rights organisations in Gaza seem to agree and condemn the closures and arrests as illegal and consider them to be the "direct result of pressure placed on the PA by the Israeli and US governments". As for national unity, "That is over," says Rantisi.

Despite the hike in tension, Rantisi cuts a remarkably relaxed figure as he sits on the patio outside his apartment on the outskirts of Khan Younis. This may be because he knows he is unlikely to be netted in the PA's current sweep. On announcing the crackdown last week, the PA's Gaza head of Preventive Security, Mohamed Dahlan, declared that there would be no mass arrests in Gaza and that Rantisi was not on the PA's "wanted list". There are reasons for the PA's reticence.

One is Rantisi's pedigree of struggle. Born in the Palestinian village of Jibna in 1947 near what is now the Israeli town of Jaffa, Rantisi has been a refugee since 1948 and is a pediatrician who has spent the better part of the last decade in Israeli prisons. In 1992, he acquired international renown as the spokesperson of the 415 suspected Hamas and Islamic Jihad supporters Israel expelled to Marj Al-Zahour in South Lebanon. On his return to Gaza in 1993, he was sentenced to three and a half years in Israeli prison for "membership in Hamas". Freed last February, Rantisi quashes all talk of a trade-off between Israel and Hamas over his release. "The Israelis had to release me. My sentence was up," he says.

But a stronger reason is Rantisi's position in Hamas. By common assent, he is the Islamists' most senior political leader in Gaza and probably throughout the Occupied Territories. He is credited with healing the breach that appeared between Hamas's Gaza and Jordan based leaderships after the mauling the movement received at the hands of the PA following the 1996 suicide operations.

Over the last six months, Hamas partially reactivated its network of social services throughout the Gaza Strip and, following the collapse of the Oslo process, scored impressive political victories in elections for Gaza's UNRWA and Engineers' staff associations. One Palestinian analyst in Gaza who is no Islamist admits that, were municipal elections to be held in the Gaza Strip today, "Hamas would sweep the board." This, says Rantisi, is why "the PA is afraid to hold them."



A Palestinian child cries as she holds a portrait of her father who is held in an Israeli jail, during a protest at the Red Cross in Gaza on Tuesday calling on Israel to free political prisoners *(photo: Reuters)*

Rantisi's authority stems not only from his biography but from the simplicity of his message. Unlike some Islamist intellectuals, he has little time for talk of an alliance with Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement to unite Palestinian ranks at a time of national crisis. "I see Fatah as part of the PA," he says, "I hope Fatah will soon realise its mistake in supporting Oslo." Nor is he overly troubled as to whether suicide bombings hurt or help the Palestinian cause. "I don't know if the military operations make Palestinians stronger or weaker," he says. "I only know what every Palestinian knows [namely] that, without revenge, Israeli attacks like the massacre in Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque will be repeated."

Rantisi's overall vision for liberating Palestine is similarly basic. "We must wait," he says, "Israel's occupation of Palestine has lasted 50 years, which is not a long time in the age of a state. Palestinians must be patient until they and the Arab and Muslim world are strong again."

In the meantime, Hamas will pursue its struggle on "two parallel paths", says Rantisi. "We will maintain peaceful relations with the PA by avoiding all aggressive reactions to the arrests and closures. But we will also maintain the struggle against occupation to defend our people and our land." Are not the two paths likely to run into one another? "That is why we must be patient," he says.

Israel exporting terrorism

King Hussein asserted that Jordan will not turn into a terrorist base after an attempt on the lives of two Israeli embassy employees was followed by an assassination attempt against Jordan's Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al. **Lola Kellani** reports from Amman

Commenting on the two violent incidents witnessed by Amman over the past 10 days, Jordan's King Hussein said that he will never allow Jordan to be turned into a base for terrorism.

The king added that Jordan has taken all necessary measures to investigate the attack on Khaled Misha'al, the head of the Amman-based political bureau of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine. Misha'al narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by suspected Israeli agents carrying Canadian passports a week ago. The king stressed that "our concern for the life of every Jordanian and anyone on Jordanian soil is equal."

Opposition parties in Jordan accused Israel of "exporting its terrorism" into Jordan and of undermining the kingdom's sovereignty and national security. The opposition, which called upon the government to freeze the peace treaty with Israel, said that the style of operation was similar to that used by the Israeli intelligence, the Mossad. They added that such an operation will not be the last "as long as the Mossad is exploiting the freedom of movement in Jordan granted to them by the peace treaty."

According to official reports, two men approached Misha'al last Thursday and attacked him with a mysterious device that emitted rays and chemicals into his ear as he was about to enter his office. Hours later, Misha'al suffered a respiratory system malfunction from which he is now recovering slowly.

According to an American specialist summoned from the US Mayo Clinic upon orders from King Hussein, the Hamas leader was injected with a poisonous substance which will be analysed in US laboratories.

For its part, the public here lashed against the government for its attempt to downplay the incident. At first, Minister of State for Information Samir Mutawi ruled out that an assassination attempt on Misha'al had taken place and said that it was a "trivial quarrel" between Misha'al's driver and two Canadian tourists. "Misha'al's driver was following the two Canadians which provoked them and lead to a quarrel which resulted in all three of them being wounded." Two days later, the same minister admitted that Misha'al had been attacked and that he had sustained head injuries following a fist fight with two Canadian tourists. In defense of his minister, the king said that he had not intended to mislead public opinion but "was merely relaying information on the incident as it unfolded."

Earlier last week, two Israeli embassy security men, Moshe Levin and Amikam Hadar, were attacked by automatic machine guns in Amman and suffered minor leg injuries. The king, who visited them in an Israeli hospital, denounced the attack and described it as "regretful, disgraceful and extremely painful." He promised that those responsible for the attack would be arrested. Shortly afterwards, the government announced a reward of 50,000 Jordanian Dinars for any information leading to the arrest of the assailants.

A previously unknown group named the Islamic Resistance Movement-Jordan, claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement issued from Beirut. The statement warned of further attacks unless members of the Israeli embassy leave Jordan within a month. The statement added that the ambush was carried out by the "Ahmed Dakamseh Mujahedeen Commando Unit", referring to the Jordanian army corporal who killed seven Israeli school girls on March 19 along the Jordanian-Israeli border. "Death awaits you in our country and we call on the government to halt any type of normalisation with the Zionist enemy," the statement said.

The attempted assassination on Hamas leader Misha'al might have serious implications on the peace process. The military wing of Hamas, Izzedeen Qassam Brigades, warned that "the Israeli Mossad's attempt to assassinate Khaled Misha'al will force us to extend the battleground against the Zionist enemy into areas outside Palestinian territory." The statement added that the brigades "are seriously studying ways to retaliate against the enemy through direct attacks against Israeli interests and personnel all over the world."

This was the first time that the military wing of Hamas threatened to carry out attacks outside Israel. The statement appealed to Hamas fighters to provide "a quick and immediate answer to this abominable crime".

The former head of Hamas's political bureau in Jordan, Musa Abu Marzouk, denied involvement of his movement in the attack on the Israeli security officials on Jordanian soil. However, it is widely believed that the attack could only have been carried out by professionals who did their homework in surveillance and implementation. Abu Marzouk also denied that the group which claimed responsibility for the attack had any connection with the Palestinian Hamas.

Libya sanctions

According to recent press reports, Libya is considering a British proposal conveyed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggesting that Tripoli hand over to Scotland two Libyans suspected of bombing the Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 in return for allowing Libyan and international observers to attend the trial, reports **Rasha Saad**.

Salma Rashed, Libyan Ambassador to the Cairo-based Arab League, said that contrary to the previous Arab or African suggestions to solve the Western-Libyan crisis, the British proposal was "an encouraging start towards a mutual dialogue." She hoped, however, that Britain will also consider the Libyan suggestions as supported by Arab and African countries.

Despite the initial Libyan welcome, Arab observers expected that Libyan leader Muamar Gadhafi would turn down the proposal as it still requires handing over the two suspects to Scotland.

After the US announced that it had evidence linking Libya to the Pan Am flight bombing in which 270 people were killed, it pushed the UN Security Council to adopt air and arms embargo against Tripoli in April 1992 until the Libyan regime agrees to hand over the two suspects for trial in either the United States or Britain.

Gadhafi rejected the Western demands and offered to have the two Libyans stand trial in The Hague at the International Court of Justice by Scottish judges, to set a special tribunal in any country other than the US or Scotland or to try them in any country accepted by the Security Council other than the US or Britain. Gadhafi's argument is that the party which presses the charges cannot be the same party which issues the sentence. Additionally, there are no extradition agreements between Libya and either the US or Britain.

The renewal in talks on solving the Western-Libyan crisis followed an unprecedented resolution approved by the Arab League calling upon its members to ease the five-year air embargo against Tripoli. At the conclusion of its foreign ministers meeting on 22 September, the Arab League called for exempting official Libyan flights and those carried out for humanitarian purposes from the UN sanctions.

The US, UN Secretary-General Annan and Britain were reportedly "frustrated and concerned" by the Arab League resolution and called it an attempt to violate UN decisions. Arab League officials later attempted to water down the effect of the resolution by saying that no flights will be exempted by Arab countries except after gaining permission from the UN sanctions committee.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

Off to a bad start

The democratic option was closed to Algeria at the moment of its liberation, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**, and the stage was set for the establishment of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy which still rules the country. From colonial repression to the absence of politics, and on to the massacres of today

It is painful to be a witness to Algeria's tragedy. More than 60,000, mostly innocent, Algerians, have been killed since 1992 when the military government annulled the outcome of the elections that had yielded a governing majority to FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), and war began between the army and the Islamists.

A lame justification was offered for annulling the election results. It was alleged that the Islamic Front sought an authoritarian system of government; its leaders had openly expressed contempt for democracy as a Western import. The allegation was correct insofar as the Islamic Front's leaders held ambivalent and opportunistic attitudes toward parliamentary government. But the Algerian establishment's suppression of the election results, a move welcomed by the governments of France and the United States, was itself undemocratic, and most undesirable both morally and politically.

To begin with, Algeria's authoritarian ruling establishment is not a credible defender of democracy. Moreover, the Islamic Front could not transform Algeria into a theocracy. If it had formed the government in 1992, the Front would have wielded partial power at best. Secular forces would have remained in control of the state apparatus. The bureaucracy is largely secular in outlook and training. The army retains ultimate mastery over the state. Algeria's economy is linked to France. In brief, the government of the Islamic Salvation Front would have resembled in 1992 the prematurely dissolved government of the Islamic Welfare Party in Turkey. Had the Algerian establishment been wiser than the Turkish army and permitted the Islamic Front to run its course in government, it would most likely have stumbled miserably out of political prominence. Instead, the Islamic Front was denied a nearly certain opportunity to fail. Jihad ensued.

The violence has grown increasingly worse. Radical, hawkish factions have hardened in the army, no less than in the Islamic movement. Neither side shows mercy even toward the innocent people who are used as pawns in their savage warfare. Each side appears determined to punish people for their views, and to push citizens — by force if necessary — into its camp. Singers have been silenced, writers and journalists are murdered, and unveiled women's faces have been slashed and disfigured by militants of the Islamic movement. On its part, the government imprisons and tortures with cruel impunity. In the last year, a new horror has appeared: masked men arrive and massacre entire villages — men, women and children.

Who are these killers? The government blames the Islamists. Mohamed Deidni, a leader of the FIS, accuses the government. No one can be sure. They could be from either side. Some observers believe these massacres are organised by hawks in the armed forces. Senior military officers are said to be divided between "eliminationists", i.e. those who advocate total elimination of the Islamic movement, and the "accommodationists" who favour negotiation with FIS moderates. The release on 15 July of FIS leader Abbasi Madani is reported to have increased the tension inside the ruling junta. As a compromise, Mr Madani has now been placed under house arrest. Some speculate that the massacres were aimed at discrediting the moderate army leaders led by General Mohamed Bechine, former director of Military Security. Mohamed Lamari, the army chief, is said to favour the hard line. There is also counter-speculation: the Islamists committed the latest atrocities in order to sabotage elections which are scheduled for 23 October. God knows what the truth is.

Victims of both sides, Algeria's people are caught between the devil and the deep sea — the so-called Islamists and the militarists. The roots of this tragedy lie in the history that immediately followed the long war of Algerian liberation. When France withdrew in July 1962, an ugly struggle for power ensued among Algerian nationalists. The winners — Ahmed Ben Bella, supported by Colonel Houari Boumedienne and his troops — favoured one-party, authoritarian, populist rule, which was then in vogue from Egypt to Ghana. The democratic option was thus closed to Algeria at the moment of its liberation, and the stage was set for the establishment of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy which rules the country to this day.

At the time of independence, power was unequally distributed among four groups. First, there was the GPRA — the Provisional Government of the Algerian Revolution. This government-in-exile, based in Tunis since 1958, was responsible for directing the armed struggle inside Algeria, procuring armaments, caring for refugees and families of cadres, and conducting international relations. GPRA officials conducted the negotiations with France leading to Algeria's independence. As the representative body of the revolution, the Provisional Government commanded legitimacy both internationally and among Algerians. Yet, as we shall presently see, in the course of that long and harsh struggle it also incurred political and psychological liabilities.

Second, there were the five *wilayat* under military commanders inside Algeria. They were respected by the people, among whom they had lived through the hard years of resistance and French reprisals. Since mid-1959, when the French effectively closed the Tunisian frontier with electrified barbed-wire fences, they had suffered especially from shortages of weapons, and nourished resentment of their leaders in exile. In 1962, they led forces that were deeply wearied of warfare.

Third, there was the 'frontier army' based on the Tunisian and Moroccan side of the border under the command of the austere colonel Houari Boumedienne. It was organised like a conventional army, with heavy weaponry including tank and armoured battalions. It had been created by the GPRA leaders in the expectation that, like the Vietminh forces in Indo-China, the Algerian National Army would one day engage its adversary in set-piece battles. That opportunity was denied it by, among other factors, the electrified boundary wall, and the Morice and Challe lines. So in Ghardimou and Oujda, its units trained, exercised, received political indoctrination, and awaited an opportunity for combat, and the chance to become the elite of independent Algeria's national army. The ALN (Armée de Libération Nationale) wielded more force than any other group; but it lacked legitimacy, and a significant constituency in Algeria.

Fourth, there were the prison people. Some 250,000 Algerians experienced incarceration of one sort or another during those seven years of armed struggle. There is hardly a family in Algeria that did not suffer the loss of a son or daughter, and barely one that did not have a child in prison.

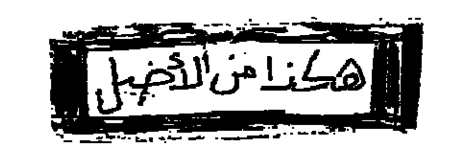
In 1956, when the French Air Force 'airjacked' a plane, capturing four "historic chiefs" of the revolution — Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamed Boudiaf, Ait Ahmed and Rabah Bitat — the prisoners gained international attention. Although Boudiaf had stronger revolutionary credentials and commanded a large following among Algerian workers, Ben Bella emerged as the most visible among the imprisoned leaders. He had the makings of a popular hero: boyish good looks, a former soccer player, photogenic, prone to seek publicity, and favoured by circumstances. With Ait Ahmed, he had robbed the post office which — so legend had it — provided the revolution's initial funding. Above all, he was a friend of Abdel-Nasser. As if Sawt Al-Arab's daily references to him were not proof enough of his standing, French radio and television, which were keen to project the Algerian revolution as inspired, aided, and controlled by Cairo, projected him as Algeria's central revolutionary figure. By 1960, prisoner Ben Bella was the most celebrated of the 'historic chiefs', a symbol of the resistance and also of Algeria's suffering. He had legitimacy, a national following, and no power.

Ahmed Ben Bella's ambition overwhelmed the commitment he had formally made to collective leadership, a precept to which the FLN (Front de Libération National) leaders — by no means angels themselves — had adhered with some consistency, and to the benefit of Algeria's struggle for liberation. Released from prison in the summer of 1962, he formed a coalition with Colonel Boumedienne to prevent the GPRA from forming a government of independent Algeria. A military formation had found a viable political ally.

Krim Belkacem, one of the most gifted guerrilla commanders of the 20th century, was effectively leading the GPRA. A Berber with long experience of living in the *maquis*, he was inclined to confront Ben Bella's challenge. As the crisis grew and the opposing forces faced each other outside Algiers, an awesome event occurred: hundreds of thousands of citizens poured into the streets, many of them weeping, others enraged, and all shouting: "Enough! Seven years were enough" — *Yakfi! Sab'a snin yakfi.* "*Le dur*", the hard man of the Algerian revolution, wept that day, as did Ben Khedda, then the president of GPRA. An agreement was reached, and honoured in the breach.

In power, Ben Bella proceeded to subdue recalcitrant *wilaya* commanders, tame one of the finest trade union federations in the Third World, take control of a Worker's Self-Management Movement that was quite unique in world history, and turn the FLN — a remarkable political organisation — into an instrument of personal power. All of these disintegrated rather rapidly. Two years later, he was making gestures to revive the FLN, permit a modicum of autonomy to the UGTA, the labour federation, breathe some life into the strangulated Self-Management Movement, and create a popular militia, obviously to loosen the ALN's stranglehold.

On 19 June 1965 at 1.30am, Colonel Tahar Zibiri ushered Ben Bella into a military jeep, and drove off into the darkness. The coup d'état was bloodless. Militarism was entrenched in Algeria. Like Ahmed Ben Bella, colonel Boumedienne was an authentic revolutionary, ambitious for Algeria. Both men failed to comprehend that authoritarian rule kills creativity, breeds corruption, and distorts society. After seven years of a very costly struggle, Algeria had progressed from the colonial politics of repression to nearly total repression of politics. I last returned to Algeria in 1967. "How do you find it?" President Houari Boumedienne inquired. He appeared displeased with my response: "*L'Algérie est mal partie*!"





Singapore school children wear anti-pollution masks. The ashy smog now spreading throughout South-East Asia was caused by fires started by timber companies in Indonesia. The timber companies have in turn come under fire from the Singaporean and other South-East Asian governments *(photo: Reuters)*

Smoke screen

Overheated South-East Asian economies are choking, both literally and figuratively, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Fire is even more dangerous than the chainsaw — one of the most hazardous tools ever invented. Forestry is among the world's most dangerous sectors to work in, with two to three times more accidents and deaths than other industrial or agricultural sectors. Thousands of forestry workers die or are maimed annually. Indonesia is no exception, but for the rapidly developing country with a population of 205 million and an economic growth rate of nine per cent per annum, forestry is the mainstay of the rural economy especially in the remote, sparsely populated and outlying regions.

For centuries, the inhabitants of Indonesia's tropical islands practiced slash-and-burn farming techniques. The relationship between the primeval forest and the primitive slash-and-burn farming techniques was as light passing through a window-pane: the light and the glass never mingle. A small part of the jungle was cleared and burned, and, after two or three years of lying fallow, it would be farmed again. When the delicate forest soil would lose its fertility, the plot was abandoned for the forest to take over and give it a chance to regenerate. Not so with modern profit-making ventures. Logging, rubber tapping and palm oil plantations mean that the face of the forests are changed forever.

Fires set two months ago by palm oil, rubber and industrial pulpwood plantations and timber companies to clear the forests have burnt out of control, spreading smog and pollution throughout South-East Asia and causing extensive health and communication hazards. Someone must be made accountable for the destruction of the forests and their precious treasure of endangered plant and animal species but the Indonesian government seems unprepared to shoulder any responsibility. The coordinating minister for people's welfare who heads the natural disaster board, Azwar Anas, said that "The country cannot be held responsible for a natural disaster. We cannot be sued." Nonetheless, some of Indonesia's neighbours have aired their grievances and blamed the Indonesian authorities for the disaster.

As the fires rage across the country and the search for culprits is on, timber concerns have come under fire. Mohamed "Bob" Hassan, a close friend and business associate of Indonesian President Suharto, publicly blamed peasant farmers for the disaster. Hassan himself, however, one of Indonesia's richest tycoons, made his fortune by exploiting the timber of his country's forest.

"Those responsible are not the small farmers but the big companies, the richest people in Indonesia," countered Emmy Hafild, director of a prominent Indonesian environmental group. The fires, devastating the region's delicate ecology, force the world to look at South-East Asia's economic miracle through another set of eyes but the crisis did not erupt without warning. "Those who work the hardest are the poorest. Those who destroy the forest are the richest. The poor are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of the smog and the ravages and vagaries of the elements," explained Wolas Krenak, a journalist from the easternmost Indonesian province of Irian Jaya with the *Suara Pembaruan*, Voice of Renewal, to me when I last visited Indonesia. I remember the Indonesian countryside as a lush paradise where jungles of tangled vegetation erupt from the rich volcanic soils, banana and palm oil trees burst through the forest undergrowth and above all the brilliant blue skies of September — the dry season.

Straddled between two oceans — the Indian and the Atlantic, Indonesia's 17,000 islands are among the world's loveliest. Exactly two years ago this last week of September, I was fortunate to sample its beauty for myself. As the plane hovered over the islands of Java and Madura towards Bali, I looked through the window. These islands seemed like emeralds set against oceans of sapphires and turquoise. Clouds melting into thin vapour did not hide the strong tropical sun. It was difficult for me to picture these scenes as I watched the latest images of the ecological disaster unfurl on television. Overnight, air traffic in Indonesia and neighbouring countries was disrupted and in places actually ground to a halt, tourism nose-dived, schools shut and hospitals could barely cope with the influx of thousands of patients.

For me, driving through the Indonesian capital Jakarta was an inspiration, a constant reminder of a Third World people's triumph over poverty and adversity. Over the din of the traffic in Indonesia's bustling capital, omnipresent cranes and scaffolding testified to a robust construction boom. Skyscrapers towered over the slums and shanty towns. Barely two decades ago, Indonesia was among the world's poorest countries. Today, it is vying for newly industrialised status.

"We are witnessing the destruction of the ecology of the entire region. Insects, animals and vegetation are being systematically wiped out," Wolas Krenak told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Palm oil plantations in the region have trebled their production in the past three years and are moving from Malaysia to Indonesia where land and labour costs are cheaper. This means that the forests are constantly under threat from developers. The determination to make the forests profitable is proof of the sheer will of big business to transform resource-rich Indonesia into the economic powerhouse of South-East Asia. The poor cannot afford to be left far behind in the mad rush to develop and they too try to eke a living out of the forest.

This is the fifth big wave of forest fires to hit Indonesia in the past 15 years, but this is the first to create such widespread pollution. The acrid yellowish haze blocks sunlight, starves plants, devastates crops and chokes to death livestock and people in the region. Tens of thousands of respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases and other related ailments have been reported in the last few days in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. The World Wide Fund for Nature's representative in Indonesia, Agus Purnomo, said that satellite imagery indicated that areas burned or under fire totalled between 500,000 and 600,000 hectares. Environmentalist also blame smouldering peat and surface coal deposits for much of the damage.

A plane crash over the smog-choked Sumatran jungle as it attempted to land in Medan, the regional hub's airport, and two cargo vessels colliding in the Strait of Malacca were blamed on the smog. The death toll from the air and sea accidents were heavy — over 500 victims between them. The adverse health impact costs millions of dollars in sick leave and has effected the economy. Up to 20 per cent of all deaths in the affected areas of South-East Asia are directly related to the fires.

The environmental catastrophe has brought into sharp focus the waning of South-East Asia's economic performance. The economies of South-East Asia have been showing signs of overheating recently. Having no fixity, they are vibrating like a pendulum between success and failure, hope and despair. The current South-East Asian currency crisis testifies to the nervousness of speculators about South-East Asia's economic performance. Too much footloose capital is at play, being tossed from one country to the next and throwing South-East Asian economies off track. There are increasing calls for the close monitoring of financial market players in the region.

The inferno in South-East Asia makes it clear that after decades of rapid economic growth, South-East Asian economies are vulnerable and suffer from serious trade and financial imbalances. The region is not immune to "economic shocks and adverse shifts in market sentiment," a recently released International Monetary Fund report warned.

The Indonesian government has allocated the equivalent of $1.07 million to fight the fires. This includes a special afforestation fund that receives levies on timber companies. Ministers have started to point accusing fingers at each other. Indonesia's Environment Minister Sarwono Kusumaatmadja criticised other cabinet ministers and top officials for slow responses to his call for action. "The nation's vigilance should be intensified and every government instruction to extinguish the fires should be carried out in an integrated and instantaneous manner," he told reporters over the weekend.

Over 8,500 Indonesian fire fighters and some 1,000 Malaysian fire fighters are battling the fires on the island of Sumatra alone. Many Indonesians feel that when the smoke of battle clears away, the local authorities should be reprimanded. "Local officials are doing nothing at all," complained Abdulrahman Wahid, a leading Indonesian Islamist.

Playing God with Southern children

Transnational pharmaceutical companies are testing an AZT regimen on HIV-positive women in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America against ethical guidelines prevailing in the North. **Faiza Rady** investigates

The United States, France, Belgium, Denmark, South Africa and the UN AID Programme were accused last month of conducting unethical medical experiments on as many as 12,221 HIV-positive pregnant women in Africa, Thailand and the Dominican Republic. The research — which is based on the groundbreaking discovery that the intravenous administration of the drug AZT (Azidothymidine) to HIV-positive pregnant women reduces the risk of perinatal transmission by two-thirds — has recently come under fire for testing the effects of varying AZT regimens on some of the contaminated pregnant women, while giving placebos to the others as a control.

This control group receives no treatment and is used to assess the medication's potency. Hence, more than 1,500 infants will be born with the disease and are unnecessarily condemned to death since previous research has established that therapy can save the life of one in every seven infants born to HIV-positive women. "We have turned our backs on these mothers and their babies," said Dr Peter Lurie of Public Citizen, a Washington-based advocacy group that has denounced the research and is seeking to end the use of control groups in AIDS studies conducted abroad. "We went public and even made the front page of *The New York Times*," Dr Lurie told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "let us see what happens from here."

Nine of the 15 studies conducted in the South are funded by the US government through the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institute for Health (NIH). The studies are designed to test the exact amount of AZT needed to prevent transmission of the disease to the unborn child. The current price of the radical treatment in the US costs about $1,000 per person — a price considered steep in the North but prohibitive in the South, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa where the average government's annual expenditure on health care has in recent years been reduced to a meagre $10 per capita. It is estimated that by the year 2000, six million women will be diagnosed as HIV-positive in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

The standard therapy involves intravenous injection of the drug in the last three months of pregnancy and once more during delivery. Then the newborn receives AZT for six weeks. Over the past two years, women in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe have been given varying dosages of the drug to test how lower dosages would compare with the standard regimen and the control group. Commenting on the use of control groups in AIDS research, Dr Aida Seif El-Dawla, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Cairo's Ain Shams University and a member of the New Woman Research Centre, explained that the ethics of using control groups are clearly defined. "If the treatment is established as a preventive measure and the experiment is just about fine-tuning the dose, then there would be a major violation of the group that does not receive the treatment," Dr Seif El-Dawla told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Outrage over the use of control groups in AIDS research in the South was expressed in editorials last week in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Condemning the "ethics of clinical research in the Third World" as directed and controlled by the major corporate funding institutions, Dr Marcia Angell, editor of the *New England Journal*, took a strong stand against using the South as a testing ground for a kind of research that has long been banned in the US and other countries of the North. "The fact remains that many studies are done in the Third World that simply could not be done in the countries sponsoring the work. Clinical research has become a big business with many of the same imperatives. To survive it is necessary to get the work done as quickly as possible with a minimum of obstacles," explained Angell.

This is not the case in the United States where "advocates for AIDS patients have all but eliminated placebo-controlled clinical trials by demanding that every patient has access to some kind of drug therapy," said political analyst Sheryl Gay Stolberg.

To counter the mounting protests, officials at the health institutes in Bethesda, Maryland, and the disease-control centres in Atlanta, Georgia, scrambled to justify their position by saying that it would be unrealistic to try to apply US research standards in the South and that AIDS research guidelines using dummy medication is approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Indeed, at a 1994 convening of the UN body, WHO experts — with no ethicists included on their panel — decided that "placebo-controlled trials offer the best option for a rapid and scientifically valid assessment of alternative antiretroviral drug regimens [AZT in combination with another medication] to prevent [perinatal] transmission of HIV."

Using this WHO position as a guideline, the officials further argue that poor women in the South are unable to afford antiretroviral treatment anyway, so that control groups are not denied otherwise available therapy.

Dr Angell disagrees and points out that the 1994 WHO position on using control groups in AIDS research directly contravenes the organisation's own guidelines, spelled out in the 1989 Helsinki Declaration of the WHO which states that "in research on man [sic], the interest of science and society should never take precedence over considerations related to the well-being of the subject," and that "in any medical study, every patient — including those of a control group, if any — should be assured of the best proven diagnostic and therapeutic method."

Hence, placebo controls should not have been used in the AIDS study since women in the control groups were evidently denied "the best proven diagnostic and therapeutic method". Also dismissing the CDC's contention that US research standards cannot be exported to the South and that poor African and Asian women are unable to afford therapy regardless of any ongoing study, Angell explained that the Helsinki Declaration as well as the Council for International Organisations of Medical Sciences require that "human subjects [in research] receive protection at least *equivalent* to that in the sponsoring country."

"Acceptance of ethical relativism [between *best* and *local* treatment] could result in widespread exploitation of vulnerable Third World populations for research programmes that could not be carried out in the sponsoring country," concluded Angell.

Funding clinical research in the South has therefore become especially attractive to the US government and the transnational pharmaceutical industry because it bypasses the cost of protective legislation in the North by relocating to developing countries where research can still be reduced to its lowest possible cost — regardless of its cost in human lives.

Dr Mona Assad, a virologist with the Egyptian Organisation for Biological Products and Vaccines, concurred. "Let them conduct their experiments in their own countries," she told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Yeltsin on NATO

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin launches new NATO partnership during a visit by French President Jacques Chirac to Russia, reports **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow. France and Russia are drawing ever closer. Although a member of the 16-nation NATO, France remains outside the NATO's integrated military command structure. And, after his talks with Chirac, Yeltsin told reporters, "We have no differences of view on any point."

"The Europeans themselves and Russia should ensure Europe's security, without anybody else interfering," Yeltsin said in a biting reference to the predominance of the United States role in NATO. Despite having signed a security pact with NATO in Paris in June, Russia remains opposed to NATO's eastward expansion. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland have joined NATO, but Russia warned that it will not tolerate and will indeed retaliate if any of the three ex-Soviet baltic republics also join.

Chirac who was accompanied by a large delegation of French business leaders, said that he and Yeltsin planned to "double our bilateral trade in the next two years." France is also to train 1,000 Russian scientific specialists over the next five years. Chirac discussed several joint projects with Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdi, including plans for an oil refinery in Ufa in the Ural Mountains region, an offshore oil terminal to be built by the French multinational Bouygues, and cooperation agreements were signed between auto manufacturers Renault and Moskvich.

Beijing woos Taipei

CHINESE Premier Li Peng marked the 48th anniversary of Communist rule Tuesday by renewing Beijing's call for reunification with Taiwan. In his National Day address at the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, Li underlined the massive economic changes the party has brought to China.

Despite growing economic ties between Taiwan and mainland China, efforts to start political negotiations have so far met with failure, as Beijing insists that Taiwan is only a province of China, while Taiwan insists on talks on the basis of equality. But the political stalemate between Beijing and Taipei is not reflected in sweeping economic reforms in mainland China.

Desertification concerns

THE UNITED Nations conference on desertification opened in Rome Tuesday with an alarming warning: there are a billion people suffering the effects of desertification. And one fourth of the earth's land mass is in danger of drying out. Drought and global warming are blamed for the desert expansion, but man was identified as the primary cause of the problem. "Over-cultivation, over-grazing, deforestation, inadequate drainage and irrigation are all aggravation factors.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), hosting the conference in Rome, warned that world population growth will require about 75 per cent more food over the next 30 years — which means increasing arable land. Desertification also engenders vast migrations of populations out of these arid lands, loss of arable land use and the need to import food. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNDP) has estimated the global cost of desertification at $45 billion.

Sudan peace talks to resume

The SPLA is wary of Khartoum's peace overtures even though the two warring parties met in Nairobi and pledged to resume peace talks. **Gamal Nkrumah** reports.

Talks between the Sudanese government and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), held in Kenya last week, ended on an upbeat note. The talks were convened in the presence of the foreign ministers of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya under the auspices of the regional Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). The regional grouping includes seven East African countries — Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

The regional ministerial meeting, chaired by Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi, urged the SPLA and the Sudanese government to find a lasting solution to the conflict in southern Sudan. In turn, the SPLA and Sudanese government representatives pledged to "fully cooperate" to end the war.

SPLA leader John Garang did not attend as he was on the frontline in southern Sudan. SPLA officials believe that the Sudanese government is planning an offensive soon to try and recapture the territory they lost to the SPLA is recent months. SPLA officals think that the Sudanese government would also like to strengthen its position before the talks scheduled for 28 October by launching an offensive with the end of the dry season in southern Sudan. Military action comes to an abrubt halt with the onset of the rainy season which takes place between June and September. An escalation of military action usually coincides with the subsiding of heavy rainfall in October.

Commander Nhial Deng, SPLA governor of Bahr El-Ghazal, represented the SPLA in Nairobi. The Sudanese government side was represented by Ali Al-Haj Mohamed, the minister of federal affairs. Justin Yac, the Nairobi-based SPLA representative in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, also represented the SPLA in Nairobi.

SPLA officals insisted that they remain loyal to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the umbrella organisation that groups together several northern and southern Sudanese opposition parties. "The talks had the blessings of the NDA and soon after the talks the SPLA briefed the NDA leadership in Asmara about the results," Kodi said.

SPLA officals are adamant that the government, and not the SPLA, resumed the talks with the SPLA. "We never broke off the talks. The [ruling] National Islamic Front walked away from the peace declaration of principles and the IGADD [initiative] in September 1994, leaving the SPLA, the mediators and indeed the entire process stranded, and this attitude has delayed the IGADD process for three years," Deng told reporters.

Deng echoed what most SPLA officials have been saying, that, "the regime has been trying to circumvent the IGADD process and supplant it with an alternative forum."

In a seperate development, another southern Sudanese factional leader went to Khartoum to sign a peace treaty with the Islamist government. Lam Akol, the leader of the ethnic Shilluk in Upper Nile Province, made peace overtures to the authorities in Khartoum who dispatched Riek Machar, another of Garang's former allies, to Lam Akol's stronghold of Fashoda to negotiate the terms of a peace agreement.

The meeting in Fashoda between two former Garang allies is designed to strengthen and further cement ties between anti-Garang forces in southern Sudan. Machar formed the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) which cut a deal with Khartoum in April and included five other southern Sudanese anti-Garang factions. Machar, who now chairs the Sudanese government's special council responsible for southern Sudanese issues, is an ethnic Nuer and has long vied for the leadership of southern Sudan.

Speaking to journalists in Nairobi before his departure to Fashoda, Machar said, "We began discussions with Lam Akol in Nairobi a few days ago. On the basis of the outcome, we're going to smooth over the final difficulties in Fashoda." In numerical terms, Akol's army is not as powerful as Machar's, but Khartoum needs all the anti-Garang forces it can lay its hands on.

SPLA officials played down the importance of Lam Akol's "defection" to Khartoum. Daniel Kodi, SPLA representative in Cairo, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Lam Akol was never a threat to the regime. He was in cohoots with Khartoum since the early 1990s. His deal with Khartoum does not surprise me."

Last week, two reports stressed the importance of foreign direct investment for developing countries. Aziza Sami and Niveen Wahish reviewed the reports

IFC financing to continue

A little over one month before Egypt will be included in the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Investable Composite Index, the IFC pledged to continue its support for the country's private sector development programme.

The step comes after the IFC, the World Bank's private sector arm, launched an Investable Index for Egypt last February. The indexes are used as a primary source of information on emerging markets.

According to Tarek Allouba, the IFC's senior projects officer in the Middle East, Egypt's inclusion in these indexes comes as a "response to *increasing investor interest in Egypt*."

The IFC is the world's largest multilateral source of loan and equity financing for private investments in developing countries.

Its annual report, issued last week, said that its strategy in Egypt is to focus on supporting private investments in the financial, tourism, value-added manufacturing and infrastructural sectors.

The report said that private sector investments by the international business community, especially in the form of foreign direct investments, has responded well to recent economic developments in Egypt.

The country, since 1992, has undertaken an ambitious structural adjustment and economic reform programme aimed at privatising public sector companies and improving the regulatory framework for financial institutions and securities markets.

But "there is still substantial room for foreign direct investments," the report said.

In line with the IFC's general policy, the organisation is also "turning to small and medium industries (SMEs)," said Manuel Nunez, the IFC's regional representative in the Middle East, in statements to reporters.

The organisation hopes to negotiate an agreement with Egypt for funding SMEs before the end of this year, he said.

"The urban renewal of Cairo, and the surrounding areas," is also one area where several businessmen have expressed an interest, said Nunez.

Gas distribution by the private sector is another item on the IFC's list, and it is also funding a major Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) port project in the Suez Canal.

"The IFC had approved total investments of $11.7 million in seven projects in Egypt for the 12 month period ending June 1997," said Nunez. These projects included the Egypt Country Fund, where the IFC invested $5 million in a $100 million international portfolio fund for Egypt managed by Lazard Freres.

In the field of petrochemicals, the IFC invested $6.5 million for the expansion and doubling in the capacity of Alexandria Carbon Black, a company which the IFC had helped establish.

In the tourism field, the IFC extended $25 million for the expansion of the Orascom Projects and Touristic Developments' fully integrated El-Gouna Resort on the Red Sea coast.

The IFC also approved a loan of up to $35 million for the Egyptian Cement Company, a private joint venture company which is setting up a large plant near Suez.

In the industrial gasses sector, the IFC is investing $5.5 million in Messer Gases Dekheila, a joint venture between the Alexandria National *Iron and Steel Co. and Messer Griesheim, a subsidiary* of Germany's Hoechst. The project is expected to cost a total of $20 million and the IFC's financing comes in the form of a $4 million loan and $1.5 million in equity.

It is also extending a $5 million load to Unipack Nile to help in setting up a plant to make corrugated boxes.

At a time when the level of direct investments in the Egyptian economy leaves much to be desired, it is the capital market which has generated the most investor interest, said Nunez.

"When we invest in the stock market, it is a mechanism for channeling funds," he said. "We look at this as a project — as creating a tool that will remain and will benefit direct investments."

IFC officials said they did not expect any decrease in their operation in Egypt in the foreseeable future because of the continued need for private sector investments funds.

Operating in Egypt since 1986, the IFC has since provided $750 million in funding for 49 projects.

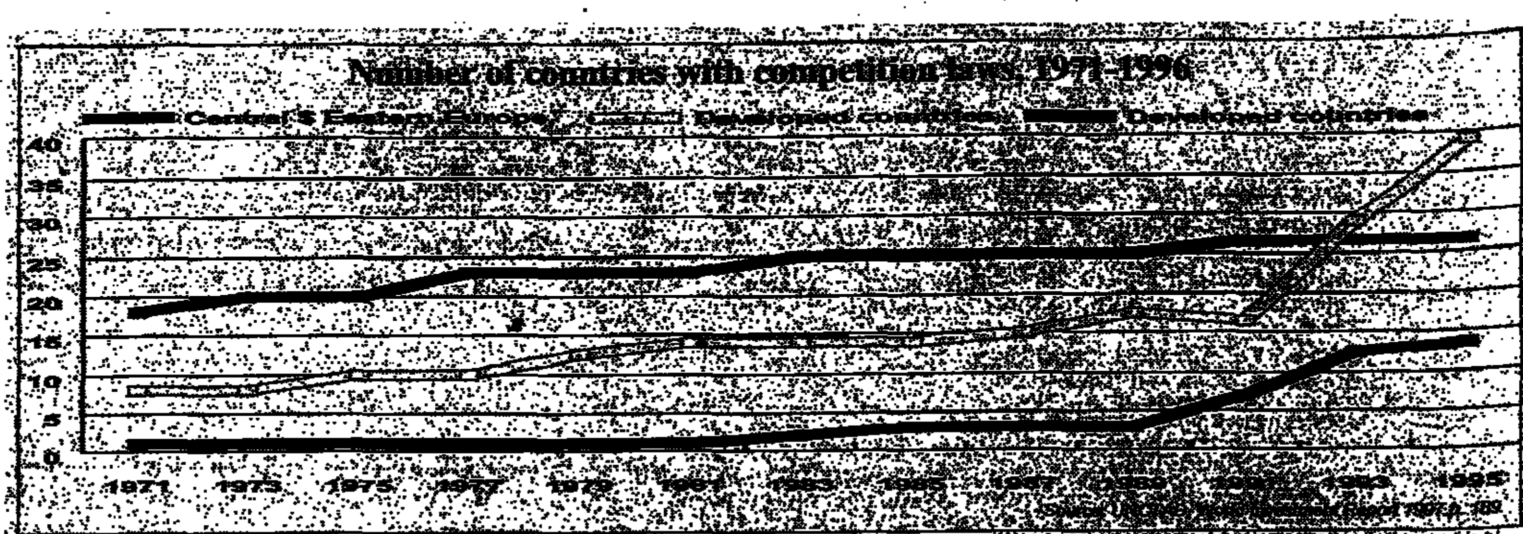
Its current portfolio of investments in Egypt is about $200 million in loans and equity stakes in 18 Egyptian companies — a figure representing half of the IFC's total funding private sector investment project in the Middle East and North Africa.

"Although the IFC has worked in areas which need the greatest private sector support, and despite all of the equity capital available... big funds from the banks go to a limited number of institutions," Nunez told reporters.

In order for Egypt to attract FDIs, "it still needs to develop a competitive market where the privatisation of companies would be instrumental for competition," he said.

With liberalisation, formerly state-owned companies formed under a certain level of protection, and which incur costs higher than necessary, will be more competitive and able to access more markets, said Nunez.

Egypt "also still has a long way to go in the privatisation of utilities, which are at the root of a private sector economy," he said. "But the economy is opening up and will draw investors."



Capital gains, competitive veins

The latest World Investment Report, issued last week by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), highlights the importance of liberalising foreign direct investments (FDI) and stresses the need for competition in a free market.

The report, entitled "Transnational Corporations, Market Structure and Competition Policies", stresses that "the ultimate objective of the liberalisation of FDI is to enhance economic *growth and well-being in countries*." This requires increasing FDI inflows, which is associated with technology, managerial know-how and market access, the report said.

The UNCTAD report begins by saying that DFI inflows reached a record level of $350 billion in 1996 — a 10 per cent increase over 1995 levels when the FDI boom first started. Developing countries, the report said, are not only receiving record FDI levels, but are an expanding source of outflows, as well.

Improved FDI inflows into developing countries is partly attributed to the increased attractiveness of these countries who boast a rapid growth rate and a large domestic market.

In 1996, developing countries registered $129 billion in FDI inflows, with Asian countries accounting for two thirds of this figure. Developed countries received $208 billion.

China topped the list of FDI-recipient developing countries, a fact attributed by the report to its large and booming domestic market and its current macroeconomic reforms.

Foreign direct investments in oil producing countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and the UAE, have been on the decline.

Although oil remains the main industry in these countries, there is a growing tendency to invest in the manufacturing and service sectors of countries like Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, for whom oil is not the main source of revenue, the report said.

According to Heba Handoussa, managing director of the Economic Research Forum, who presented the report in Cairo, investments are not only moving away from the oil sector, but multinational companies are now not targeting new markets just because they have cheap labour.

Referring to an UNCTAD poll of managers of multinationals, Handoussa said that the results showed that the size and potential growth rate of the market topped the list of reasons why companies may enter these markets.

As a result, countries participating in regional economic blocs, or who will possibly join one, are more likely to catch the eye of multinationals, she said.

Privatisation was another key factor that led to an increase in investments in developing countries. Eastern European countries, for example, witnessed an increase in FDI in 1995 as more public sector companies were sold off, Handoussa said.

Egypt, she noted, is an exception to this rule. With only six companies fully privatised so far, foreign investments in Egyptian companies being privatised have most come in the form of foreign portfolio equity investments.

While stressing the importance of foreign investments for economic growth, the report calls on governments to ensure that their markets operate fairly, and stresses that competition must accompany liberalisation when it comes to the removal of restrictions for foreign business operating in developing countries.

"The reduction of barriers to FDI and the establishment of positive standards of treatment for transnational corporations need to go hand-in-hand with the adoption of measures aimed at ensuring the proper functioning of markets," said UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero.

This includes, in particular, "measures to control anti-competitive practices by firms," he said.

The report also recommended that governments ensure that competition is maintained so that economic growth and welfare are not affected by inefficient allocation or use of resources.

The possibility of monopolistic practices by firms requires the continuous attention of authorities, it stressed.

"Countries need to keep in mind that competition policy is not a substitute for FDI policy and trade policy," said the report. "Rather, all three are mutually supportive in the pursuit of efforts to ensure that markets function properly."

Magda Shahin, director of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's Economic Department, who joined Handoussa in presenting the report, focused on the importance of the control of competition.

Globalisation is a challenge to the economies of developing countries, and increases the possibility of their being marginalised, she said. To avoid this, there must be tight regulatory measures to ensure market efficiency.

Although the report touched on this issue, it did not give it enough attention, said Shahin. Instead, it focused on the advantages of FDIs without referring to the disadvantages.

Shahin also pointed out that since the main target of liberalising investments is to raise the rate of growth and the living standards of individuals, these investments must be accompanied by technology-transfer, upgrading managerial skills and guaranteeing accessibility to markets.

Liberalising investments should be accompanied by the application of regulations to prevent foreign investors from monopolising the market and the country's resources, she said.

Shahin added that there is also a need to balance between foreign investments and to control any possibility of monopolistic practices to ensure that consumers have access to a low-priced, high-quality product.

Egypt can increase its attractiveness to FDIs if it joins a regional economic bloc, she said, explaining that this would make it a launching pad into neighbouring economies for investors.

Forging ties with the Bear

Egypt and Russia again look to each other for boosting their national economies. Nevine Khalil reviews the agreements signed during Mubarak's state visit to Moscow last week

During President Hosni Mubarak's three day visit to Russia last week, steps were taken to lay down the foundations for stronger economic ties between the two countries. Embodied in six agreements between the two governments, as well as four memoranda of understanding between the private sectors in Egypt and Russia, hopes were high for prosperous economic ties.

In 1992, trade between the two countries figured at just over $57 million, of which Egyptian exports totaled roughly $36 million. But four years after the break up of the Soviet Union, the trade balance shifted dramatically in Russia's favour. In 1996, Egypt exported about $37.6 million-worth of goods to Russia while importing products worth $370.4 million.

Russia is not only a huge market in itself, but is also the gateway to the markets of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

When the CIS adopted free market economies, Egyptian businessmen, whose experience was in dealing with the Soviet Union, were caught off guard.

"Our people were not sure of how to deal with the new entities," one Egyptian official explained. "Would they continue (to do business) in the old fashion or in a new way."

As a result of the time it took to settle this debate, part of the market was lost because of the strong competition, mainly from Israel, Turkey and Spain. Fiercer competition is expected when Russia finalises negotiations for its membership in the World Trade Organisation.

Mubarak and Russian President Boris Yeltsin witnessed on 23 September the signing of most of the bilateral agreements, which mainly focused on facilitating private sector cooperation and investment. The joint committee, which prepared the documents, is scheduled to meet again in Cairo next year to follow-up on the result of its work. Also next year, both sides agreed to hold an economic conference in Egypt.

Six agreements were signed between the two governments. One agreement seeks to promote and protect investments in both countries, while another aims at doing away with the double taxation that burdens businessmen investing in either country.

Cooperation in scientific research was ensured in another agreement, which also provides copyright protection for scientists in both countries. A fourth, maritime agreement, regulates bilateral cooperation in transport by sea and coordination in national ports.

A fifth agreement, signed between the two ministries of justice, facilitates cooperation in the field of law enforcement and states that sentences passed in one country would be recognised and carried out in the other. The sixth agreement, which goes hand-in-hand with the fifth, tackles security issues and provides for the exchange of information and know-how between law enforcement agencies in both countries. This is expected to curb the spread of crimes related to terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, arms trade and illegal emigration.

The private sector reached four memoranda of understanding. The first allows for the creation of a joint company for the promotion of agricultural products with a paid capital of $10 million. Egyptian businessmen would provide 60 per cent of the company's capital while their Russian counterparts are responsible for the remaining 40 per cent.

Another memorandum concerns the creation of a joint stock company with a paid capital of $10 million, where the Egyptians also hold 60 per cent. This company will be responsible for marketing Egyptian products in both Russia and the CIS. The company is expected to begin operations by the end of this year.

The third agreement calls for the creation of a private sector maritime transport company. Negotiations about this company are expected to continue next month. The last memorandum of understanding, signed between the Egyptian Export Development Bank and Roseximgarant, tackles the creation of a company for insuring exports. The Egyptian Exports Development Bank expressed its willingness to support the proposed company, either through financing facilities or by putting up part of the capital. In addition, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce for Suburban Moscow signed a sister agreement.

Recent Egyptian-Russian cooperation has led to the establishment of the Abu Tartor phosphate project, the upgrading of the iron and steel complex in Helwan, a coke and chemicals factory and the modernising of the power station in Aswan.

In trade matters, the Russians were concerned about overpriced Egyptian products, restrictions on Russian exports to Egypt, the lack of financing mechanisms and that Egyptian businessmen take too long to study proposals presented to them.

The Egyptians, on the other hand, were very interested in a Free Trade Agreement. The Russians have promised to look into this agreement.

While such an agreement opens the door for Egyptian products into CIS markets, Russian exports would also have passageway to Middle East markets.

Egypt is also interested in exporting agricultural products such as potatoes, rice and oranges to Russia, and lengthy discussions were held regarding setting up companies needed to increase trade between the two countries.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Message of the Korean ambassador to Egypt

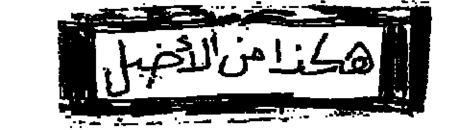
Change, reform and continuity; these seem to be the pillars of Korea at the time when my country is celebrating its National Foundation Day. For the Korean people, 3 October is a symbol of democracy. It embodies *Hong-ik Ingan*, which means "Devotion to the welfare of mankind". This phrase was the slogan of Korea's legendary founder Tan-Gun in 2333BC.

Yim Sung-Joon
Korean Ambassador

Since the establishment of full diplomatic relations opened a new partnership between Cairo and Seoul, Korean-Egyptian ties made impressive strides and are not only sustainable, but have great potential for growth.

Since then, the Korean Embassy has been satisfyingly busy with Korean missions visiting Egypt and reciprocal visits by Egyptian officials and businessmen to Korea. Today, a number of Korean companies, working in harmony with their Egyptian counterparts, are producing a variety of goods here in Egypt. Cars, refrigerators and televisions with Korean nameplates are becoming more and more popular among Egyptian consumers.

In the field of economic aid, Korean interest takes the form of patrol cars, vocational training equipment, medical equipment, and military vehicles. A number of Egyptians every year are sponsored to visit Korea for advanced technical studies, representing another dimension of Korean-Egyptian cooperation. In conclusion, let me have the pleasure to send the readers of this newspaper my warmest wishes on the occasion of Korean National Foundation Day.



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

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Inaugurated in 1908, the Mohamed Ali Industrial Training School in Alexandria gave a chance to poor children to learn the trades needed to satisfy new demands in the Egyptian consumer market. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** follows the birth and fruition of the project

In 1906, Mr Dunlop, the British adviser to the Ministry of Education, submitted a memorandum to the British high commissioner requesting that the government devote renewed energies to promoting occupational training. He suggested that "the Casanova School in Naples serve as a model. This man established his school in the aforementioned city in 1864 with the purpose of providing moral upbringing to the children of the poor while teaching them a trade or craft."

The advantages of this system, in the opinion of the British adviser, were that the instructors were themselves self-employed craftsmen and artisans interested in making a profit. The school selected only the most skillful and, consequently, "it has developed an excellent reputation for its products. Students do not receive wages during the first three years of training. After this initial period, the school master sets a wage for the student in agreement with the student's employers. This wage is paid directly to the school master who deposits it in the school's savings account. Only the student's parents or guardians can have access to the savings."

Dunlop's report, published in the British high commissioner's annual report for 1906, brought back to the surface a cause for which Egyptians had pressed for many years — the need to establish an industrial training school. The demand for such a school had acquired particular urgency with the turn of the century. The heavy influx of Europeans and the attendant changes in Egyptian fashions and material ways of life generated new demands that were not always readily satisfied by the local labour market. As Cromer writes, "It is difficult to find a native Egyptian shoe repairman to mend European style shoes, even though such shoes have become commonplace."

At the same time, many traditional crafts and trades were falling by the wayside. Saddle manufacturing was becoming extinct as a result of the introduction of tramways. The manufacture of straw mats was disappearing because of the introduction of floor tiles. As for the textile industry, writes Cromer, "it too faces rapid decline as European textiles are taking the place of domestically produced textiles. Traditional dyeing techniques are virtually extinct because now the fabrics needed to manufacture popular clothing are imported already dyed from abroad using new artificial dyes."

Not that the British authorities immediately perceived the solution as the establishment of occupational training schools. The prevalent attitude was still that "Egypt is an agricultural society". Year after year, high commissioners' reports would insists that, "since Egypt is an agrarian country by nature, it is obvious that agriculture should be its primary concern. All forms of industrial or occupational training can only yield a single result — the neglect of the land. To curb the inclination of this people toward farming would bring catastrophe upon the nation." The refrain was guaranteed to drive Egyptians, particularly intellectuals and notables, to seek to prove otherwise and to advocate the promotion of occupational training.

Although a few occupational training schools did exist, such as the Royal Crafts and Industries School funded by Khedive Ismail in Boulaq in 1868 and the Mansoura Industrial School founded in 1889, they were no longer capable of meeting modern demands. The decline of these institutions was in large part due to the British educational policy of putting an end to free education in many levels of education.

Against this background, Egyptians had no alternative but to take matters in their own hands as they had done in so many other instances involving national education. The initiative began in Alexandria, where the *Urwa Wuthqa* (Indissoluble Bond) Society launched subscriptions for the proposed "Mohamed Ali Industrial Training School." As was its custom with such initiatives, *Al-Ahram* opened its pages to cover the progress of the subscription campaign, publishing the lists of contributors and adding its editorial remarks to promote the enterprise.


Mohamed Ali

The fundraising campaign was clearly successful. The newspaper published over 100 lists of contributors who ranged from prominent dignitaries, such as Ahmed Manshawi Pasha, who dedicated 100 feddans of land in trust to the new project, to students from the Royal School of Law. *Al-Ahram* was particularly heartened by the latter contribution and commented, "We greet this deed with the utmost joy and contentment as it proves that all segments of the nation are acting in solidarity and mutual support."

On 19 February 1908, nearly five years after the initiative began, *Al-Ahram* announced to its readers that the long awaited inaugural ceremonies for the Mohamed Ali Industrial Training School would take place the following day. Such was the importance of the occasion that government ministers and advisers would travel from Cairo to Alexandria "in order to attend the grand opening over which will preside His Royal Highness the Khedive, for this occasion not merely celebrates the opening of a school but also it lays the foundation for national independence."

Al-Ahram's correspondent in Alexandria took the opportunity to provide readers with a lengthy description of the new institution. Because of the contribution of LE1,000 per year by the National *Waqf* (Religious Endowments) Authority, in addition to the many generous contributions of the public, he wrote, "the school will be able to provide free education to 300 students. It will accept students between the ages of 12 and 18 and, although a primary school certificate is not required, applicants must know how to read and write." An advertisement placed in *Al-Ahram* shortly afterwards confirmed that the school's primary purpose was to educate the poor.

According to *Al-Ahram*'s description, the premises of the new institute were quite extensive. It consisted of 43 rooms, nine large and fully equipped departments providing instruction in mechanics, plumbing, carpentry, carving and engraving, European upholstery, shoemaking, printing and binding. Hardly had the school opened its doors than the school officials pressed for opening new departments.

So successful was the Mohamed Ali School that a sort of Casanova school fever spread to the rest of the country, with charitable societies and prominent members of society launching appeals for similar institutions in Cairo and the provinces. As the "fever" spread in the countryside, it was not long before occupational training schools were established in Damanhour, Manoufiya and the Fayoum, and even further afield in Upper Egypt in Beni Suef and Luxor. This development was lauded by *Al-Ahram* which commented, "If the poor were educated to possess a craft or trade from which they could derive their livelihood and serve the country, the Egyptian nation would be well on the road to such splendid progress that it would be secure against the evils of poverty and hardship."

Nevertheless, such success could not pass without a cloud. European merchants in particular saw in the spread of these modern schools a threat to their own business and argued that they offered unfair competition to foreign businesses and jeopardised foreign imports. What is certain, however, is that, in spite of this minor cloud, the occupational training schools on the model of "Casanova" were off to a healthy start and continued to flourish, as is confirmed by successive annual reports of the British high commissioners.

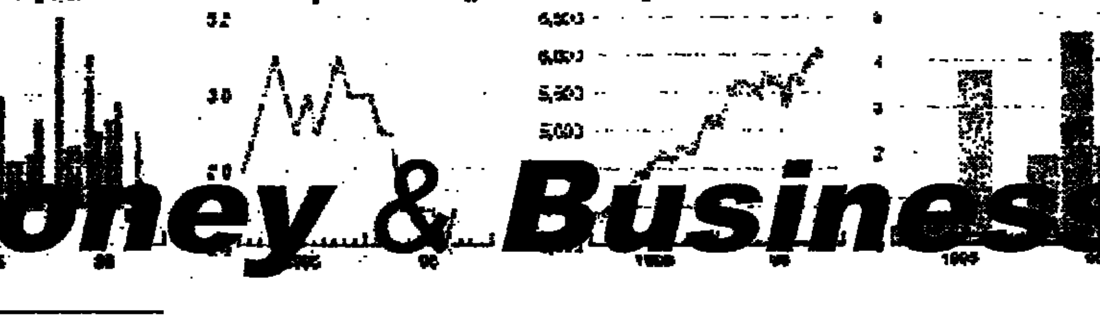

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Honouring successful students

TO STRENGTHEN social ties with employees and their families, Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt held a party to honour its employees' children who graduated from schools and universities during the past academic year 1996/97.


Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa

Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa, governor of the bank, handed out cash awards to the graduates as part of the celebration. Graduating students of Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt employees, and those who have retired, numbered 410 this year.



Reading glasses from Clear Cut

MANY people above the age of 40 ignore the necessity of using glasses to correct their nearsightedness, something which prevents them from efficiently carrying out their work. This is because the eye, after the age of 40, becomes weaker and less powerful, making the need for glasses a necessity. Reading glasses from Clear Cut are calibrated from +1.0 to +4.0, which makes it easy to find your type.

For the first time, the styles of SFC are being distributed in Egypt through Multi-Pharma, making it easy for you to find Clear Cut at all major pharmacies throughout the country.

Exchange of expertise


Christian Mayerhoffer Head of SYSTEMS 97

DUE TO the success achieved by Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) and the worldwide reputation it gained in the area of telecommunications, officials of SYSTEMS 97 Munich were interested in exchanging expertise with ACITEX, to benefit from the Artificial Intelligence Conference, which will coincide with the computer exhibition from 18-21 February 1998.

It is worth noting that SYSTEMS receives about 100,000 visitors and displays the products of 1,731 participants from 72 countries.

IBM and Microtech team up to offer integrated solutions

IBM offers an integrated solution that will fulfil all the needs of both public and private, small and giant establishments. These solutions help all the sectors of different companies to efficiently carry out their tasks, by controlling and planning all the company's activities. It also helps managers and department heads to make the right decisions without overtaxing the company's budget. For these reasons, IBM and Microtech have teamed up to offer this unique solution.

Microtech has had long experience in Egypt in the field of computer programing to cover the needs of the different companies no matter how big or small their activities may be or how diverse their needs. Since the mid-80s, Microtech has automated more than 1,500 companies taking into consideration the rapid changes in the world of business. Microtech has also provided programmers and computer users in the Middle East with equipment and accessories that suit their needs and abilities, and which also match computer development all over the world.

Through the unified offer of IBM and Microtech, any establishment or company can apply Solution Plus to fulfil its needs. Solution Plus is comprised of personal computers and computer servers from IBM in addition to integrated solutions for financial, administrational, and commercial applications that fulfil the needs of the departments and their different activities. Solution Plus provides management with elaborate details and reports that help in decision-making and controlling the flow of work in the company. Integrated Solutions are comprehensive and efficient in the following fields:



The Financial Solution Package:

General accounting - purchasing and suppliers - sales and customers - stores - credit letters - fixed assets.

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Personnel - salaries and payments.

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Installments - contracts - sales points.

Microtech also offers post-sale services to suit its customers' needs. One of the post-sales services is system consultancy by which filing courses are assessed and improved. Also there is the service that designs financial systems, and cost account systems and their applications through the integrated solution package. Because such services are vital for the efficiency of those programs, it is Microtech's concern to offer its post-sale services as soon as the client requests them.

Specifications of IBM's high performance personal computer and servers offered in this package include:

IBM PC
Intel Pentium Processor- 16 MB RAM - 256 K
Cache-2.5 GB HD-2MB
VRAM-Ethernet Card-14" Monitor
IBM PC Server
Intel Pentium Processor-64 MB RAM-Ultra Fast
SCSI HD-8X CD- Ethernet
Card-Tape Drive-15" Monitor

Our Solution Plus package also offers installing and training services in addition to the guarantees offered by the two companies.

The Solution Plus package offer includes a special discount on the occasion of putting the system out on the market so that it can be obtained by the different types of companies both big and small.

Online 'shopping' for trade fair information at SYSTEMS 97

WHEN SYSTEMS 97 opens its gates on 27 October 1997, some visitors will know exactly which of the 25 halls at the trade fair centre to go to in order to find the exhibitors of their choice — provided they have access to the Internet either at home or at work. Beginning in early September, the Munich Trade Fair Corporation will open the most clear-cut online programme on the Internet to date. Those who visit the SYSTEMS site at http://www.systems.de can link to the SYSTEMS visitor information system, which will guide them through the halls of the trade fair centre and directly to their destinations.

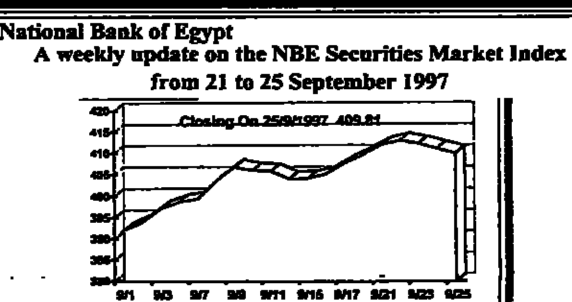
This service was extremely popular among visitors at last year's SYSTEMS and is being expanded to a full scale information system for this year's fair. As a result, visitors with questions can find the right answers before the fair even begins. As of this summer, interested visitors can register to be put on a special mailing list to receive information per e-mail about hotels, how to get to the trade fair centre, exhibitors and trade fair events that meet their specific interests, as indicated on the order form for this free service.

Together with futuristic interactive maps of exhibition halls and a sophisticated database of all exhibitors, these services will help visitors prepare for SYSTEMS and save time in the process. Direct links to the manufacturers' home pages (more than half the exhibitors have their own web sites) allow visitors to gather even more detailed information about the manufacturers' products in advance.

As was the case last year, we expect the SYSTEMS visitor information system to primarily be used by trade visitors. Expanding the SYSTEMS visitor information system into an interactive trade fair guide turns SYSTEMS into a well-planned and stress-free information event.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 21 to 25 September 1997



The NBE Index has increased 0.30 points to register 409.81 *points for the week ending 25/9/1997 against 409.51 points for* the previous week ending 18/9/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %	Company	Changes %
El-Qahira Housing & Development Co.	9.3+	North Cairo Milling & Baking Co.	3.8-
The Arab Drug Co.	5.6+	Egyptian Starch & Glucose Manufacturing Co.	3.6-
Société Financiere et Industrielle d'Egypte	2.3+	Alex. Commercial Maritime Bank	1.9-
Alexandria Iron and Steel	1.8+	Paint and Chemical SAE Co. (PACHIN)	1.4-

Al-Ahram Weekly

Disunited Nations

In his speech before the UN General Assembly earlier this week, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa left no doubts in the minds of delegates as to who was responsible for the current stalemate in the peace process. Israel's intransigence is as undeniable as the fact that the UN represents a throw back to the Cold War era.

For over 50 years, the UN has attempted to pass itself off as the world's mediator. But it has fallen far short of this goal lately, largely because it is dominated by powers who look out for no interests other than their own. The West waves the banner of human rights — as it should — but only when it is convenient. It imposes sanctions against so-called rogue states, but fails to even issue a binding criticism of other nations who flagrantly deny a people their right to sovereignty and self-determination.

To blame for this is the Western dominated Security Council which has succeeded in largely emasculating the rest of the UN. Moussa's proposal that this council be reshaped to include justified permanent representation of developing countries is the freshest and most plausible suggestion that has been heard in the UN in years.

But will it see light of day? If the US has any say, it probably will not — at least in the form Moussa presented it in. Rather, the US feels that climbing aboard the moral bandwagon, hurling accusations and conspiracy theories as if they were going out of style, is the best way to tackle a matter which runs counter to its self-professed set of morals.

With over 140 nations falling in the category of developing nations, it is no longer possible to ignore the calls for real justice — not that which is cemented in purely Western terms. If this is truly the dawning of a new world order, then the cultural, religious and political differences existing between countries must be addressed, and resolutions should no longer be lamely vetoed for fear that they may offend one party.

Al-Ahram Weekly

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th FL, Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036. USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

First, define normalisation

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that a Press Syndicate debate must precede excommunication

For much of September, I was out of the country and therefore unable to follow the debate I have since been told was triggered by Dr Mohamed El-Sayed Said's article in *Al-Ahram* entitled "The Press Syndicate: collective conscience or herd mentality?". The article took a dim view of the Syndicate's decision to subject Lotfi El-Kholi and Abdel-Moneim Said, two main Egyptian architects of the Copenhagen Declaration, to an inquiry for having violated its earlier decisions regarding the total boycott of Israelis. As I was initially a party to the dispute over Copenhagen, and because I believe the enquiry to be headed in a critical direction, I feel I cannot remain aloof from the debate.

My concern over the direction taken by the enquiry is greater still because, for some time before Copenhagen, I had been advocating a process of 'selective boycott' of Israelis, on the grounds that boycott was a means to an end, and not an end in itself, its ultimate aim being to reach an equitable settlement for the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. Moreover, the duality inherent in the line of total boycott adopted by the Press Syndicate at a time when the state has full-fledged diplomatic relations with the object of that boycott is a source of perpetual tension which is bound to expose Egyptian journalists to the kind of situation we are now seeing — not to mention the fact that such a duality is incompatible with the strong links between the Egyptian media and the state. Another argument in favour of a selective boycott is that Netanyahu's accession to power makes it more imperative than ever for the Arabs to play an active role in exacerbating the contradictions inside Israeli society — impossible with a total boycott — instead of sitting passively by while Israel, which is not inhibited by a boycott approach, exploits the contradictions in Arab ranks to the full.

When I criticised the Copenhagen meeting, it was not because it initiated a dialogue with Israeli intellectuals and aimed at isolating the more extremist elements in Israel, with Netanyahu at their head, but because the gathering took the form of a negotiating process which led to the issuance of a common declaration and the establishment of a mechanism to follow up its implementation. As I saw it, this was not the role of intellectuals but of state negotiators. Moreover, any meetings between Arab and Israeli intellectuals should be devoted to clarifying the unexplored reasons for the continued intractability of the conflict in defiance of all efforts to resolve it. This would characterise them as the continuation of the conflict by other means rather than as a process of normalisation.

The implementation of such a line, while not necessarily positive in all conditions, can be extremely positive in others. For example, the timing of the Arab signatories of the Copenhagen Declaration proved to be off when they decided to make the first manifestation of solidarity with peace forces in Israel against the construction of a Jewish settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. But the situation could be different at a time when Netanyahu is becoming increasingly isolated both inside Israeli society and among prominent leaders of the American Jewish lobby.

I certainly differ with Dr Mohamed El-Sayed Said's description of Egyptian journalists as being driven by a 'herd mentality'. One has only to recall the Press Syndicate's valiant defence of democracy in its successful struggle to get the infamous Press Law 93 revoked. Having said that, however, I must admit that the harsh campaign launched by various writers in the press against Dr Said is disquieting, not only for objective but also for subjective reasons. I myself could just as easily become the victim of a similar campaign, although I have respected the rules of the game and have not been to Israel, defending instead my point of view inside Egypt and making a point of upholding it both inside the Syndicate and before the President of the Republic.

Some of Dr Said's interlocutors were careful to point out that they were condemning the Copenhagen group not because they held views that ran counter to those of the overwhelming majority of their peers, but because they had dared translate those views into action by actually going to Israel in defiance of Syndicate resolutions. However, a very thin line separates opinion from action, especially in an atmosphere of tension such as that now pervading the debate.

Some time before Copenhagen, I was asked in the presence of a radical audience in Egypt whether I would be willing to go to Israel. I replied that I could not commit myself to not going, if only because the future can compel us to do things that are impossible to predict in advance. I added that all I could promise at this time was that, if ever I did go, it would not be the result of an individual decision but of a collective one, leaving the definition of "collective" open. One possible choice here could be the Press Syndicate, in view of its democratic traditions. But the question is whether these traditions would continue to apply when it comes to the issue of lifting the total boycott. It is a question that only the Syndicate can answer. One way of doing so would be to come out publicly and state in no uncertain terms that any journalist, including myself, is entitled to propagate his or her views on the issue without being called to account.

Many of the journalists who are today demanding that Lutfi El-Kholi and Abdel Moneim Said be called to account praised my refusal to take part in the Copenhagen meeting, conveniently forgetting that, even as I distanced myself from this particular event, I made it clear that I was not against meeting Israelis in principle. Which begs the question of whether in praising me at the time they were not trying merely to use me in their campaign against those who did take part in the meeting.

More generally, the offensive now directed against the Copenhagen group can backfire. One should remember that the current president of the Syndicate, Makram Mohamed Ahmed, was promoted by the late President Sadat from senior columnist at *Al-Ahram* to editor-in-chief of *Al-Mussawar* after he went to Israel at a time when an overwhelming majority of journalists stood firmly against any form of normalisation. And the same Syndicate which is now condemning certain of its members for having visited Israel only recently elected Makram Mohamed Ahmed as its president with a comfortable majority.

While I am totally against muzzling any journalist on this issue, I do not condone Dr Abdel-Moneim Said's statement to *Ha'aretz* that he doubted whether the Syndicate would be able to subject him to an inquiry. The clear implication behind this statement is that he enjoys the support of high quarters which the Syndicate would not dare challenge. Even if this is true, journalists should uphold the independence and democratic traditions of their Syndicate, not contribute to their diminution by counting on external forces.

There are issues on which the total boycott of Israelis is counterproductive. To name but a few: the need to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinians of Arab East Jerusalem against Netanyahu's systematic policy of judaising the entire holy city; to participate in the Palestinian struggle against the construction and expansion of Jewish settlements all over the West Bank and Gaza, and not to remain aloof in this vital battle under the pretext that joining the Palestinians will require the procurement of Israeli permits. Moreover, can we totally ignore the Palestinians who refused to abandon their land in 1948, who are now Israeli citizens, but who consider themselves Arabs culturally? Recently, Hafez El-Assad received a delegation of Arab Israelis, some of whom were Knesset members, others members of Zionist parties.

Several of the participants in the debate over Dr El-Sayed Said's article came up with interesting remarks, notably Salah Issa and Wahid Abdel-Meguid. Dr Abdel-Meguid noted that there were divisions within the camps of both the opponents and the advocates of lifting the boycott, the opponents over whether the boycott should apply, within the context of the Euro-Arab dialogue, to trans-Mediterranean meetings where Israelis are often present; the advocates over whether lifting the boycott should include visiting Israel or not. This confusion in itself justifies putting the highly controversial issue of what normalisation actually means to an open political debate before taking disciplinary measures against those charged with violating Syndicate resolutions in this regard. Salah Issa, for his part, noted that the Syndicate's decision to open an inquiry called for the establishment of a commission whose mandate is limited to listening to the offenders and does not extend to charging them. An open debate can help defuse the crisis instead of falling into Netanyahu's trap of becoming an arena for the most tenacious contradictions throughout the region.

The meaning of stones

In the first instalment of his study of the "Intifada paradigm", **Abdelwahab Elmessiri** examines the fruits of popular resistance

Several years ago, I decided to change my style of teaching. No longer would I practice the prevalent method of cramming my students' minds with facts and figures, which are readily available in thousands of encyclopedias and other reference books. What is lacking in Arab education is the awareness of the relationship between data and its meaning. Such an awareness can only be acquired through an extensive process of conjecture and abstraction which enables the researcher to perceive the pattern behind any mass of information. This process involves abstract conceptualisation against which the researcher tests, orders, or discards enormous quantities of available facts and details in terms of their applicability, thereby deriving a cohesive paradigm of relations. Instead of reducing reality to a random set of statistics, the construction of a paradigm orders data in accordance with a precise scrutiny of reality and assigns the various items of information their true valence.

This is the process I applied to my study of Israel. I was not content simply to gather facts. Rather, I was intent upon observing Israeli reality in light of several paradigms. For example, I noticed that the Israelis in 1948 had fallen prey to the illusion that "the resistance has been uprooted" and that there were, in the words of General Benyamin Eliazer, indications among the Palestinian leadership of "a diffident trend toward pragmatism" that would ultimately reconcile itself with the need to "adjust to realities on the ground."

I also observed a strong tendency in Zionism toward hedonism (which led me to coin the term "Zionist air-conditioned settlement drive" and, three years later, prompted Israeli military commentator Zaif Sheif to speak of "settlement deluxe"). At the same time, the Palestinian people showed increasing self-awareness as well as a growing awareness of the psychological make-up of the Israelis. In this connection, I wrote: "The citizens of the West Bank have come to realise that everything that can ruffle the tranquility of life for the settlers will ultimately frustrate the Zionist scheme." In that same article, I predicted that throwing stones would become the Palestinians' most powerful and effective weapon, in spite of its obvious crudeness. This development put in perspective for me General Eliazer's insistence to *Ma'arev* newspaper that he "would put an end" to this phenomenon as well as the fact that the Israeli prime minister at the time informed two Knesset members that the phenomenon of stone-throwing deeply disturbed him.

In my article "Stone throwing in the West Bank", published in *Al-Riyad* newspaper on 24 February 1984, I predicted the Intifada four years before it broke out. I could not have made this prediction if I had simply sat back and observed the passing of isolated events. In fact, my prediction was based on observations of a group of human beings with a specific outlook that determines their reactions, expectations and, consequently, their behaviour. The Zionist who seeks to raise the standards of living of the Arabs in the hopes that they will forget their national identity and demands for nationhood is the same person who aspires to a life of comfort and ease by a swimming pool in one of the Zionist settlement complexes. The Arab who refuses to succumb to the pragmatic vision which seeks to domesticate him is the person who is able to realise the extent of internal decay that has transformed the settlers into voracious, non-productive consumers. Hence the significance of the stone which, though it may not kill, clouds the settlers' complacency and undermines the meaning of their life.

When the Intifada did erupt, it brought jubilation to millions of Arabs, Muslims and inhabitants of the Third World who understand the implications of the Zionist presence at the centre of Asia and Africa. I was in a frenzy of work on my encyclopedia of Judaism and Zionism when I came across a report on one of the incidents of the Intifada. I had already observed that songs and symbolic colours figured prominently in the demonstrators' protests, but I had not imagined that their resourcefulness extended to what I termed the "watermelon ruse." The Zionist occupation forces had prohibited the Palestinians from raising the Palestinian flag and regularly punished offenders. Therefore, instead of openly defying the prohibition, when the Israeli troops passed, the demonstrators would slice open a watermelon and lift up the halves in order to display the colours green, red and black — the colours of the Palestinian flag. Perhaps, too, the act of cutting open the watermelon brought ominous images to the minds of the passing soldiers.

The watermelon was an entirely original weapon, available at any fruit merchant's stall. Nor can the enemy confiscate it without appearing universally ridiculous. It is very economical as well as recyclable: protesters could eat their watermelon after displaying its colours. The watermelon was guaranteed to provoke the enemy without providing the pretext to exercise brutality. Moreover, the watermelon ultimately symbolised the true arena of conflict: it was the weapon of the people par excellence. It is difficult to imagine that your regular hamburger eater and habitual disco-goer could readily take to using the watermelon as the Palestinian flag. In the same way, the song as revolutionary theory and the stone as a weapon were the *in extremis* inventions of a people oppressed on every level.

The writer is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

Crescent and cross

By Naguib Mahfouz

I object to the US Congress' report stating that the Copts are oppressed in Egypt. Concern for human rights must not be dictated by political considerations, but the members of Congress failed to abide by this rule; why does the report not mention Palestinian Christians, who are clearly oppressed by Israel?

This, however, should not stop us from taking a good, hard look at our own backyard without the intervention of any foreign party, whether or not there is cause for complaint at popular and governmental levels. We should be prepared to decide on the correct treatment for any given problem. It is not enough to state that the issue is an internal affair and that no foreign intervention can be allowed; we must have the courage to deal with issues that arise in the correct manner.

Courage must be present on both sides, as was the case during the Revolution of 1919, when no one knew who was a Copt and who a Muslim; we were all Egyptians fighting one battle against one enemy to achieve freedom for a single nation. During that period, there was total unity between Copts and Muslims. The truth is that Egyptians, Copts and Muslims, are one race. People of my generation described themselves as being of Egyptian nationality and of Muslim or Christian faith.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week
Russian revival

Al-Mussawar: Both Egypt and the USSR benefitted in the past from their friendship — Egypt was the USSR's gateway to Africa and the Arab world and this cannot be lightly dismissed.

Although the USSR has faded away, Russia, which is what made it a global power, remains, and is slowly regaining its role as one of the two main guardians of Middle East peace. All forecasts predict that Russia will regain its world influence by the beginning of the next century, and it would be unwise to allow the legacy of relations with it to go to waste.
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 26 September)

Akhbar El-Yom: From all we have heard and seen about Mubarak's visit to Moscow, there definitely is something new on the Russian horizon. And that could mean a thawing-out of the frozen peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis. We were wary of the return of the Soviets to the region after we expelled them, but now the USSR is no more and Russia is governed by people who believe in democracy and respect other nations. Today's Russians are not like yesterday's Soviets, so we welcome them.
(Ibrahim Saada, 27 September)

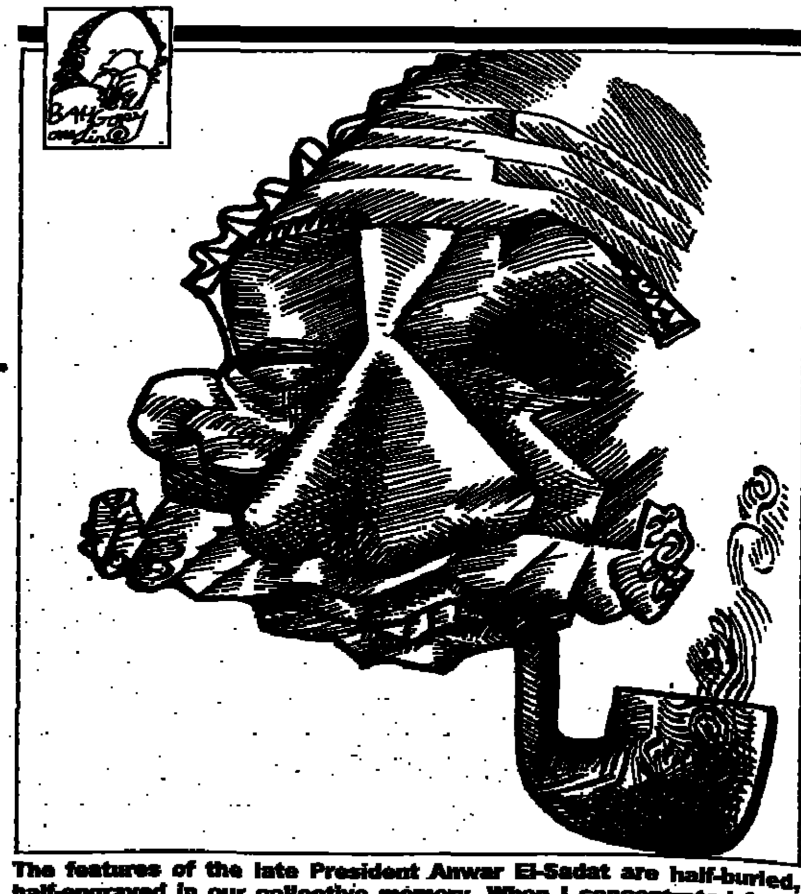
Al-Shaab: Mubarak's visit to Russia is a positive step in our foreign policy within the framework of developing relations with China, India, the Asian Tigers and Africa. There is no doubt that this visit is linked with Egypt's economic renaissance and its ability to export. The visit also puts Egypt's relationship with the US in its proper place in the military, economic and political fields. It will also help keep Russia away from military and space cooperation with Israel.
(Editorial, 26 September)

October: It was the Russian leader who called the visit a breakthrough. When Mubarak's plane touched down in Moscow, the prevailing atmosphere was much warmer than expected. Russia has changed, as have Egypt and the whole world, for that matter. One thing, though, has not changed: the friendship between Russia and Egypt based on years of cooperation in the production field. After this visit I expect the distance between Cairo and Moscow will be much shorter and relations will revert to what they once were.
(Ragab El-Banna, 28 September)

Al-Arabi: We hope that Mubarak's visit to Russia will mean the beginning of the end of the link with the US, which has monopolised the Arab world for too long. What has alarmed nationalist trends is growing US influence and dependency on all things American, which means putting all the cards in US hands despite the blind bias for our enemies. Relations with Russia are an extension of relations with China, East Asia, the African states and Third World countries, and stop us from depending on one power. They are also the way to develop independent Arab strength to confront US-Zionist adventures.
(Editorial, 29 September)

Al-Gomhuria: Media feedback from Moscow indicates that President Mubarak's visit was a success. And the joint communiqué reaffirms what each country thinks of the other. Russia sees in Egypt a friendly Arab nation which holds a pivotal position in the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean and plays an effective role in world affairs. Egypt sees in Russia a friendly power which plays a constructive role in world affairs, is linked historically and culturally with the nations of the Middle East and shares their hopes and aspirations. In the words of Amr Moussa, it is a positive and fruitful relationship in all respects.
(Editorial, 26 September)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The features of the late President Anwar El-Sadat are half-buried, half-engraved in our collective memory. When I concentrated for a moment, they began to emerge. His face, which reminded me of a solid block of copper, is an integral part of a certain phase of Egyptian history, a time when we found ourselves at a crossroads: peace with Israel and the Open Door Policy. But his smile of victory imposed itself upon me: it recalls the 6 October War, and the soldiers who died the death of heroes while liberating Egyptian territory.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Believe it or not

The CIA has never been notorious, in its long history of covert and overt activities in the Middle East, for giving the Arabs any help. On the contrary, it has always provided a cover for subversive operations aimed at sabotaging those Arab regimes which are not on good terms with Washington, or furthering and covering up Israeli interests.

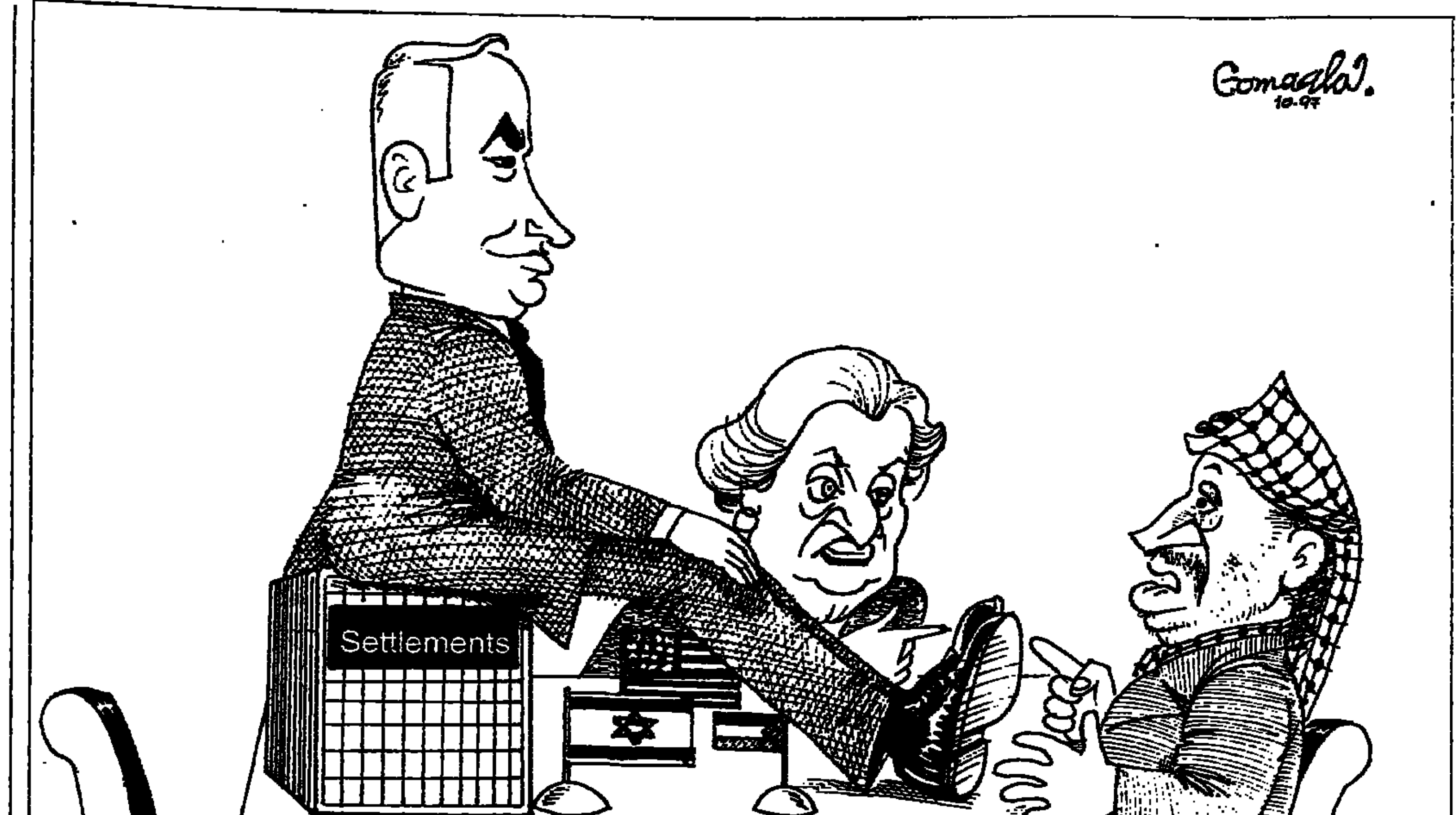
The CIA's last effort in this respect was the abduction and removal to Washington of the North Korean ambassador to Egypt. The US wanted information on the type and quantity of weapons and equipment supplied by North Korea to certain Arab nations, which Israel accuses of producing missiles which might threaten Israel's security. Cairo was obliged to keep silent over this operation, which was carried out on sovereign Egyptian territory for reasons best known to the perpetrators — reasons which we will not discuss.

The most recent episode of the CIA saga, published in the *Washington Post* by its editor, concerns the fate of the Libyan dissenter Mansour Al-Kekhia, who disappeared from Cairo in 1993. The writer claims that Egyptian agents abducted Al-Kekhia and handed him over to the Libyan government. The Libyans executed him and buried him in an unknown spot in the Libyan desert a year later. This article leaves no room for doubt that the CIA's activities in the region are a burden on US relations with the Arab world — especially at a time when the Americans themselves admit that the CIA has lost much of its efficiency and failed miserably in many assignments, particularly in the Arab region.

This is hardly surprising, considering that cooperation and coordination with the Mossad is the cornerstone of CIA activity in the Arab world. This story has been leaked at a moment when the possibility of Arab revolt against the abusive sanctions imposed on the Libyan people has been growing. This story, and others like it, are aimed at Egypt and the Arab nations that strove within the Arab League to issue a resolution calling for a lifting of the sanctions against Libya and a review of the Security Council's right to impose sanctions. This situation is obviously unacceptable to the Israeli lobby and the US Congress, and is seen as undermining American efforts to isolate the Libyan regime and Colonel Gadaffi.

In addition, the timing of these revelations concerning Egyptian agents and their alleged involvement in illegal and unethical activities is very interesting. Such activities have never been carried out on the behest or with the knowledge of the Egyptian leadership. The aim of all this has been to relieve international pressure on Israel and Netanyahu's government, and to divert attention from the criticism levelled at Israeli espionage activities in Egypt, most notably the case of Azam Azam, which aroused a furore in Israel that continued even during the Israeli president's visit to Egypt.

At any rate, we must continue to shed light on cooperation between the CIA and the Mossad if we are to expose the lies and fabrications intended to poison the atmosphere in general, and undermine the credibility of Egypt in particular.



Soapbox

Half-baked successes

Madeleine Albright finally paid her long-awaited visit to the Middle East, but only after thousands of victims had fallen prey to the Israeli government. Demolishing Palestinian homes, expropriating Palestinian land, tightening the blockade on the Occupied Territories and continuing the expansion of Israeli settlements: these are Netanyahu's policies, and he has no intention of deviating from them.

Land is, and always has been, at the heart of the conflict. Generation after generation of Palestinians have sacrificed themselves in the struggle to defend their land.

In her speeches to the Arabs, Albright reaffirmed the principle of land for peace, the need to implement UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 347, and the US administration's commitment to the Oslo Accords. But she overlooked the fact that Israeli settlements, economic blockade, evacuation of Palestinian residents from Jerusalem, and the obliteration of the identity of this holy city spell death to the Palestinians.

Albright may have been partially successful. She has held follow-up meetings with ministers and high level experts. But soon, Netanyahu will brandish Israeli security requirements, and defy the international community once more.

The US administration must take the lead, condemn Israeli settlements and ask Israel to halt settlement construction. In Israel itself, there is a movement opposing the settlements. The US will find that a clear policy will receive widespread approval, while double standards can only spark further resentment.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the Palestinian representative at the Arab League.

Mohamed Sobeih

Roger Tamraz in America

In trying to expose an especially egregious instance of "un-American" corruption, writes **Edward Said**, the American pundits had the tables turned on them, as Tamraz revealed that everyone had a finger in the pie



Roger Tamraz first made an appearance in the American media earlier this year when his name appeared among a list of contributors to the Democratic presidential campaign and to the party's coffers who were guests at Bill Clinton's White House. Although he was listed as being one of the larger donors — $300,000 was the figure mentioned — he did not seem to have rated the ultimate in treatment, that is, he wasn't allowed to spend the night in the Lincoln bedroom nor, as especially privileged supporters were, fortunate enough to have breakfast with Bill and Hillary the morning after. By the late summer, when the issue of campaign financing had become a national obssession debated by Republicans for partisan reasons as a way of embarrassing the Democratic incumbent, and for shamefaced Democrats an issue to be removed as quickly as possible, Tamraz's name began to surface with some frequency. Shortly after the nauseating furor over Princess Diana's death had somewhat died down, the Senate began to hold hearings on the campaign financing scandal, and a few days later Roger Tamraz regaled the Senate, and a bemused American public, with his candidly unrepentant views on what he did. For about a week therefore he became the media's man of the moment, appearing for many hours on television talk shows, Senate hearings (that were rebroadcast over and over on cable channels), and in innumerable "thoughtful" commentaries by pundits who *didn't quite know what* to do with this rather cool and collected man who seemed totaly unruffled by the press and governmental storm all round him.

Tamraz was usually described as a Lebanese-American businessman, someone whose purpose in seeking presidential political influence was to get help in establishing a pipeline from Azerbajian on the Caspian Sea — which has oil reserves that more than match those of the Arabian Gulf and have therefore become a target of opportunity for major American oil companies — to the Mediterranean. Tamraz often referred to himself as owning an oil company with a billion barrels of oil ready for transport, and he also said of himself that he muscled his way into the international oil business by buying a chain of Italian gas stations (called Tamoil, I think). Earlier this year I met the chief executive officer of a large American oil company who said about Tamraz that he was "irregular" in his dealings and "erratic" in meeting his obligations; he hinted that various legal threats and pressures had to be exerted on Tamraz in order to extract what was owed from him. And during each media appearance it was mentioned that Tamraz was wanted by Interpol. When asked directly about this on a prominent national Sunday news show Tamraz simply didn't respond. Asked a second time with a cherubic expression on his face he produced the brilliantly inconclusive remark that "that wasn't the whole story," but made no effort whatever to give his questioners the whole story. Typical of the moribund state of American media performance these days, the questioner simply pressed on to something else, leaving viewers with the distinct impression that Tamraz may have been more sinned against than sinning.

I followed Tamraz's brief television and newspaper career in part because I knew him many years ago in Cairo. A few years younger than I was, he was my sister's classmate at the Cairo English School when I was at Victoria College until the early fifties. Later that decade I would see him with some frequency at the Gezira Club where one episode that I witnessed has always remained fixed in my memory of Tamraz. As a squash player I would spend time either playing or watching the game at the club and of course got to know most of the other players. I was once watching a match between a friend of mine, a very fine player, and someone else, a match which my friend won rather handily. Midway through the game Tamraz came to sit next to me in the stands and commented with supreme confidence that he didn't think much of my friend's game and would bet both me and him that he, Roger, could beat him. I had seen Tamraz play and may in fact have played him without feeling that he was a particularly challenging or accomplished player. Still the brazen daring of his taunt caught my friend's attention who, irritated at this young fellow perched on the stands above him, told him that he'd be happy to take him on right away. Tamraz accepted on condition that they play for five pounds (a sizeable sum in those days), and without further ado he entered the court and began playing. I also recall that he disconcerted my friend still more by saying that he didn't need any warm-up time and would be willing to start the match without any preliminaries. I was flabbergasted that although he began weakly, Tamraz ended up by handily defeating the other player not so much because he played better but, I think, because his audacity and brazen self-confidence, plus his tenacity, totally threw off his opponent who was ultimately crushed.

I remember thinking at the time that Tamraz's brash forwardness was due in some measure to his very diminutive size, which he over-compensated for with a remarkable air of self-assurance. Thereafter I saw him in Cambridge where in the final year of my doctoral studies at Harvard, Tamraz fetched up to study for his Master's degree at the Harvard Business School: this was during the early sixties as I recall. Later in that decade I encountered him at various friends' houses in Beirut, to which he had come as an executive for Kidder, Peabody, a famous American brokerage and management firm that had been retained to run the by-now defunct Intra Bank, which had collapsed in 1966. Tamraz and I were never close friends but we had cordial relations, so much so that a few years later he wrote me about his brother who had ambitions to be a poet and who wanted help in the US from me. But of course I followed his meteoric rise during the Amin Gemayel years in Lebanon without ever actually seeing him. He was reputed to be involved in several get-rich schemes in war-torn Lebanon, most of which had a sleazy air about them. Later I read somewhere that he had in fact been wanted for embezzlement in Lebanon and, unless I am very much mistaken, France; about a year ago he was described in the *New York Times* as being held in custody in Azerbajian, but was released a few days later because American officials had interceded on his behalf.

During one of his talk show appearances last week Tamraz was asked by a particularly sanctimonious reporter whether what he had contributed to Clinton could be described as *baksheesh*, a word that was plainly intended to introduce a disapproving racist note into the discussion. It was as if she was saying "you Middle Eastern types do this all the time whereas in our more elevated world such practices are not only rare but frowned upon." Tamraz immediately replied that the difference between *baksheesh* and what he gave Clinon was that *baksheesh* carried with it a guarantee of delivery (honor among thieves) whereas in the US and with American politicians one could never be sure that they would live up to their word. A nice touch, I thought, which punctured the hypocrisy of journalists and other politicans pretending to be shocked at such bazaar-like tactics. Tamraz brought everyone back to earth. This is the way it's always been done, here and abroad, he said and if one wants to be in the game and play with "the big boys" one had to be prepared to cough up large sums. Why are you surprised, he said mentioning that Robert Rubin (treasury secretary) and Felix Rohatyn (a wealthy investment banker just named to be ambassador to the United Kingdom) got their positions because they contributed large sums of money to the Democrats. When he was asked whether he regretted spending $300.000 without the Azerbaijan pipeline to show for it, he coolly replied that next time he'd be giving $600.000. In trying to expose Tamraz as an especially egregious instance of "un-American" corruption, his interlocutors had the tables turned on them when he revealed that their pretended naivete was idiotic since everyone does what he did, Middle Eastern or not. He might also have mentioned, but did not, that the Israeli lobby spends millions of dollars annually to buy support from members of Congress who take the money willingly and vote for Israel without the slightest hesitation. Every major interest — the defense industries, pharmaceuticals, car manufacturers, the gun lobby, etc. — spend literally billions on trying (ususally with a high rate of success) to influence legislation in Washington. Why, Tamraz, kept asking, are you surprised when you know perfectly well that this is done routinely as an aspect of a "free" market economy?

Two further points about Tamraz interested me particularly. One is that he belongs to a social group in Egypt to which I used to belong, that of the *Shami*, or Syro-Lebanese expatriates who were merchants, publishers, professionals from about the middle of the last century through the middle of this one. My family belonged to a minority within that group: we were Palestinians, but the schools I went to, the clubs I and my family were members of, the kind of milieu I inhabited, was similar to Tamraz's. We were Levantines. Some did honorable things for their society and were unjustly punished during the Nasser period. Many, however, remained entrepreneurial adventurers who transferred their attentions during the late 1950s from Egypt to places like Lebanon or the Gulf countries where the commercial possibilities were greater and, it must be said, the laws were more flexible. The history of this complex community is a rich and fascinating one, but has not yet been examined historically or sociologically. Most of us were commerciall enterprising: Tamraz's family owned an automobil parts and battery-supply company whose premises I remember well as being on what was Malika Nazli Street. My family owned an office equipment and stationery company which included the Tamraz company as our clients. We were welcomed in Egypt, enjoyed its marvellous life and people, but with only a few exceptions it was a passing phase for many of us.

Tamraz, I think, embodies that spirit, and it was certainly its energy that enabled him to become an American businessman (with a hazy past) whose patriotism to the US was never questioned. Indeed he revealed that during the 1970s in Lebanon he was a CIA informant, thereafter proving to be unwavering in his American loyalties. Thus the second point about this particular *Shami* is that he found a warm welcome in the US, at the same time when that country was supporting Israel against Lebanon, the Palestinians, and most of the Arab pro-democracy movements that continue to fight for a better Arab world. It is no small irony that someone like Tamraz can be welcomed here and in the White House rather than a real Arab democrat, or for instance Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian citizen who opposes the injustices of the regimes and wants a dialogue of equals both with Israel and the US. Such people are considered radical enemies by the US. How sad that the US, which professes the brotherhood, dignity, and equality of man is more capable of dealing with wheeler-dealer businessmen with unashamed profit as their goal than with people who profess the same dignified ideals as American officials do. One can imagine that the Arab world would have been a better place today if it was not a Tamraz, but an Arab civil rights lawyer, a principled Arab feminist, an honest Palestinian or Syrian or Iraqi or Lebanese intellectual who had no interest in being subsidised by the Ford Foundation or the US government, who had been the one to testify in Congress and appear on television. In the meantime, Roger Tamraz will thrive and the struggle for a better Arab world will continue without him, and in spite of US policy.

The many faces of authoritarianism

While Arab countries were among the first to experiment with parliamentary institutions, few boast extensive political freedoms today. In the first part of this study, **Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed** surveys the shift away from democracy

Political change in the Arab world poses a dilemma to observers of Arab politics. The upheavals in other regions, particularly those that were ruled until a few years ago by regimes described by political scientists as "totalitarian" or "authoritarian", were echoed only faintly in the Arab countries. The Arab world therefore passed through "the third wave of democracy" relatively unaffected. Some analysts found in this "deviation" from what they perceived to be a universal trend an expression of Arab "exceptionalism", while others rejected this notión, but still came to the conclusion that prospects for democracy in the Arab world were dim.

This dilemma is indeed intriguing, for some Arab countries were among the first to experiment with parliámentary institutions. These pioneering experiments were carried out as early as the 1860s. Constitutionalist movements arose on the political scene in several Arab countries before independence. Egypt, Tunisia and Kuwait offer proof that the demand to establish accountable governments moved important sections of the political elite. After independence, some Arab countries, in particular Lebanon and Morocco, committed themselves to the respect of political pluralism, and banned, in letter or in practice, the one-party system, while other Arab countries — such as Egypt — were at the vanguard of those which started to move away from that model.

The process of political change that began in the Arab countries around the mid-seventies could be described simply as a process of political liberalisation initiated from above. Steps taken towards liberalisation of the political system ranged from the recognition of elections as the basis of legitimacy of the political system, the authorisation of professional associations and political parties, the introduction of a degree of freedom of expression, fair elections, and a certain separation of powers — if only in formal terms — by facilitating the opposition's presence in legislative bodies and respecting the judiciary's independence. In none of these countries, however, has a sustainable transfer of power through the ballot box to opposition parties or a consistent respect for the civil and political rights of citizens occurred.

Elections have become the standard mechanism for selecting rulers. Arab monarchies, of course, have banned elections completely, with the exception of Morocco, Jordan and Kuwait, where some or all members of the legislature are elected. Elections, however, amount to little more than a plebiscite in most of the Arab republics.

Professional associations are authorised in many Arab countries, but are still completely banned in most of the Gulf countries, while they come under stringent government or ruling party control in countries ruled by a single or dominant party, or those led by mass organisations. They have enjoyed a degree of independence, however, in Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt.

Islamist and communist parties are banned in many Arab countries. The Algerian government, for one, persists in its rejection of the Islamic Salvation Front, which has been forbidden from functioning since January 1992.

A measure of freedom of the press has become common in some Arab countries. In Lebanon immediately after the end of the civil war, pluralist ownership of the media persisted despite government attempts to curtail such freedom. In Morocco and Egypt, the press does enjoy a measure of freedom. Despite formal commitment to freedom of expression, very little diversity of opinion can be discerned in the media of other Arab countries.

Elections of national legislatures have allowed opposition parties to establish a considerable presence in the national assemblies of several Arab countries, particularly Morocco, Jordan and Egypt. In Egypt, the presence of opposition parties has been reduced to less than four per cent of parliament, following the highly contested People's Assembly elections of December 1995. Similarly, the opposition never exceeded an insignificant minority in Tunisia.

These changes bring several points to light. First, single- or mass-party regimes have been replaced in several Arab countries by a multi-party system, in which some newly authorised parties reflect a diversity of ideological trends and give voice to specific social or ethnic groups, while others have no distinct ideology or significant following. Second, groups which are representative of important segments of public opinion and have attracted an important following havé not been legally recognised.

Professional associations enjoyed some independence at different times, but when they were dominated by people close to opposition parties, new regulations limited their autonomy, and their leaders were imprisoned. Views critical of the governments of Egypt, Algeria, and Lebanon are to be found on the pages of their newspapers, but journalists are assassinated in Algeria. Furthermore, even in those Arab countries where the press is relatively unrestricted, regulations often curtail what little freedom they have recently acquired — this notwithstanding the success of Egyptian journalists in obtaining the repeal of many provisions of a restrictive press law.

These changes constitute limited steps on the path of political liberalisation. Elections are held in Iraq, Syria and Sudan, or advisory councils are appointed, but these changes are cosmetic, and do not even demonstrate a genuine wish for liberalisation. Violations of civil and political rights are the rule in all these countries with no exception. Some assaults on the freedom of conscience and expression are the work of specific groups, notably those claiming to act on the basis of their own understanding of the teachings of Islam. This, of course, is clear in Algeria and Egypt.

The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.



Well worth the wait

Nehad Selaiha rediscovers the pleasures of "weightlessness" in a new AUC production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*



Lately I have been dogged by the ghost of Beckett and his flock of fictional characters. In Edinburgh, last month, at a small, nondescript hall off the beaten track (I had been lured there by the prospect of watching what was billed as a hilarious one-man show) I found that the "one man" for whose sake I had taken so much trouble was none other than the tediously loquacious Mr. Krapp, under a pseudonym here, but still embroiled, after nearly 40 years (the play was written in 1958) in his endless coils of taped inane solipsistic "krapp". The performance was as depressingly bleak and arid as the world view projected in the text.

Back in Cairo, I was treated, in the course of CIFET, to more Beckett in the form of two lifeless productions of *Happy Days* from Argentina and *Waiting for Godot* from Venezuela. Both left me cold and bored and made the plays feel dated. They had only one virtue — that of familiarity, and we all know what that breeds. On both occasions I found myself thinking that Beckett's work has finally, perhaps, outlived its theatrical viability and exhausted all possible interpretations — political, historical, philosophical or metaphysical. Gone are the days when the antics of Vladimir or Estragon had the shock of novelty or could inspire wild enthusiasm or obstreperous anger. Sadly, the daring experiments of yesterday make the hallowed conventions of tomorrow. In a perceptive essay Roland Barthes once described the process of taming the avant-garde and assimilating it into the mainstream ideology. Among others, he cited Beckett as an example and, indeed, one wonders if it ever occurred to Beckett when he wrote his first play after the war that in a few years time his cynical and embittered appraisal of the human condition would become an institutionalised, commercially lucrative commodity exported the world over.

The problem with Beckett's plays seems to me to lie in the voluminous mass of critical writing that has built up around them over the years and solidified into an almost impenetrable, lethal crust. They have been taken far, far too seriously, treated as philosophical treatises rather than plays, and in the morass of this "critical mass" of explication and interpretation, their life giving roots in the music hall, circus and silent movies have got submerged. My first exposure to a Beckett play, *Endgame*, back in the sixties, was an unforgettable experience simply because, while the proceedings on stage called for laughter, all those around me sat grimly attentive, hanging upon the actors' every word as if expecting some epiphany to emerge or the meaning of life to be suddenly fathomed. The tradition seems to have persisted: as late as 1993 I saw a student production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Theatre Institute where the students trod the boards, glowering portentously at the audience and glaring balefully at one another. At the end, they rushed down stage, startling the audience with the mysterious cry "Man is Man", which happens to be the title of one of Brecht's more famous plays. They had presumably found Beckett's play too weak and negative and decided to inject it with a good dose of robust Brechtian socialism.

Few artists, in my experience, have been able to approach Beckett's plays with the theatrical zest they deserve and, indeed, require. Tori Haring-Smith's current production of *Waiting for Godot* for the AUC Theatre Company at the Wallace is one of the funniest, most refreshing and enjoyable I have seen of the play. The secret lies in a healthy disregard for philosophical pretensions, an honest admission that by now the message of the play has become all too clear, an unselfish reluctance to impose a point of view or to nudge the viewer into reading "symbols where none intended"; but, above all, it lies in Tori Haring-Smith frank, wholehearted and exultant embracing of the artificiality, that is, the built-in theatricality of the play.

I could hardly recognise the Wallace when I stepped into it. It had been dismantled and restructured to create an intimate theatre in the round with an exciting sloping performance area. The audience sat on all sides, at various levels, and the effect of this fan-shaped, uneven seating arrangement was to create for the audience the illusion of being precariously balanced on the tip of a precipice and about to fall in. The sense of danger, albeit illusory, accentuated the feeling of intimacy and partnership in the game particularly when the actors dashed among the audience trying to hide or escape. But the only escape route, a side door that leads out of the theatre altogether, had been intelligently placed in the new spatial structure at the very bottom of the slope. Thus, quitting the theatre became the equivalent (for the duration of the performance) to quitting life, and the Wallace became a physical, concrete metaphor of the world. Occupying the centre of this vivid metaphor was the familiar lonely tree, here pathetically exposed on all sides, providing no hiding place. To enhance the theatricality, both the lighting and the acting had a charming simplicity and a studied child-like feel which contrasted beautifully with the make-up of the performers and their costumes. The actors (Tarek El-Etrebi, Karim Mansour, Shereef Bishay, Mohamed Abu Rayya and Sayo Yushioka) were not only competent, but brought to their parts an infectious energy. They, with their director and her crew, managed to reconcile me to Beckett. With them, waiting for Godot was an immense pleasure.

Music

Songs from the lily pond

David Blake minds the doll

Song Recital; Stars of the Cairo Opera Company and pianist Pascale Rozier; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 25 September

Bonsoir Debussy — and friends. Forsaking all others, when the names of French musical items come up as in this recital, throw away your problems and prepare for pleasure.

In all music there is nothing like the French. France musically is another name for civilisation. From Couperin through Messiaen to Boulez, the Gallic touch has remained immaculate, style and style again. It gets away with everything, like the Opera Garnier de Paris, richly gilded but the gold is real.

And so was this concert. Singers say the French language is the most difficult of all to sing. Partly true, but it is the style that is the problem. Difficult to capture, this style is an ancient art of wrapping the tones around the all-important beauty of the words. The French tones are longer than most other musical tones — long and sumptuous. So, for French song it is best to have everything, and few have.

The singers of this night's songs almost had the lot. The songs mostly came from the epoch they once called belle. Belle it was, but it ended in the 1914-1918 holocaust which brought down a world. Style was more valuable than truth. Style is truth, or more like time. There it is safer to leave French music and its incomparable cachet to the artists who know how to deal with it.

Ashraf Sweilam opened with a pair of songs, one by Debussy, one by Fauré, both called *Mandoline* and both difficult. But Sweilam and his bass voice managed them because his tone was pure and light enough for the velvety Mandoline. Reda El-Wakil continued with two more Fauré songs, *Chanson du Pêcheur* and *Les Berceaux*. Heavy voices have trouble with Fauré. It is difficult to fit them to the delicate mold of melody, but this voice knows words and so the music glided on.

Ravel — Don Quichotte à Dulcinée: three songs, each different meanings and moods: a mood of reflection, a mood of life acceptance and a drinking song to carry on easing life's problems, respectively. Fauré and Ravel both lived into the post-war European years, surviving the Belle ones. They aged gracefully, but the shock shows. Ravel's Don gave Zaidan a chance to show his voice but in music which had lost the old suavity. The three aspects of Don Quichotte were touching and human and sung with great swagger. This Don was not done for.

Then Massenet. His music is still underrated. All his operas work as drama in the theatre. Their workmanship is totally professional and one day perhaps one of his works, *Manon*, could enter the Cairo Opera repertory. Hassan Kami finally appeared and sang the Massenet version of Goethe's *Werther* in fine, forward voice. Kami is good at suggesting Werther's painful frustration in a voice which managed the long, trying lines of the aria.



Brigida Bzinkiewic

Then Iman Mustafa gave two scenes from *Thais*, matinée masterpiece of passion and turmoil in ancient Alexandria and soon to be performed in its entirety at the Opera. *Thais* has found God after having a rather disreputable career, but what about her unfortunate lover who has lost everything, including God, in the process of falling in love with her? Massenet works it all out beautifully, offering giant roles for all, particularly sopranos whom he was dotty about, individually and as a vocal species. Iman Mustafa was in strong voice, reaching the high altitudes of her role without the obligatory screams most singers of *Thais* permit themselves. The duet with Reda El-Wakil was exciting, and a taste of what the performance in November would offer.

Massenet died in 1912, pre-Holocaust I, and it shows in the easy, confident flow of sounds that were perfect in a more opulent era.

Halevy wrote an opera, *La Juive*, on *Merchant of Venice* territory and it has great roles for tenor and bass, in fact so great that it is hardly ever performed. Ashraf Sweilam undertook the Stygian depths of his role and then gave Richard Wagner's version of *The Two Grenadiers*, famous for its treatment of the Marseillaise. Wagner turns it into an entire pocket opera which the singer enjoyed.

Massenet again, this time with a song called *Prière* which suited Kami who strung out the long, trying high *tessitura* without trouble. Iman Mostafa did a great aria, Pleurez Mes Yeux from Massenet's *Le Cid*, which suited her highs and new lows and the firm middle of the voice.

Good old *Carmen* ended the concert with Kami and Caroline Dumas as Don Jose and his abandoned village sweetheart Micaela. Both these singers are artists who know their job. Don Jose is Kami's part, Hamlet with a bread knife for stabs. Dumas in her arias showed how French vocal music must be dispatched. It is an emanation between race, poem, and note — and so should be delivered with a unique kind of joy. Joy for tears and love, she's happy to sing about. At the end of her duet with Kami she produced a long, swelling, dying away note which was the most beautiful thing of the evening — a love like a brush stroke of Monet, a tone floated up from the lily pond of Giverny.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Opera Gala; Brigida Bzinkiewic (soprano), Carlos Montané (tenor), Ahmed El-Saedi (conductor); Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 27 September

After a cataclysmic dust storm during the day it did not look as if there were many people left alive for this evening's concert celebrating international tourist day. The Main Hall was about half full.

Rimsky-Korsakof is always luscious, the Capriccio Espanole lasciviously so. The organ-like tones of its opening were a success. The exciting Spanish tones flashed and went off like rockets and it ended under El-Saedi's direction in a devilish Czardas-like ending, more à la Russe than Espanol.

Giordano's opera *Fedora*, from a play by Victorien Sardou written for Sarah Bernhardt, is a Russian *rodomontade* about the Romanovs, about how poisonous and awful they were with Fedora Romanov and her secret police doing away with all the wrong people including her lover's family. But it offers great operatic roles for the singers. The tenor has an aria that became what they used to call a "tenor gem", written for Caruso who created Fedora's lover. It is a perfect small aria made up of a heavenly gift of a song for a tenor and does not deserve the term "operatic garbage" usually flung at it. This tenor, Carlos Montané, sang and acted it with feeling and a lovely voice.

Once there was a water nymph called Russalka who used to rise from a river and sing a song, *O Lovely Moon*, to the heavens. It is Dvorak's melodic genius at its best, one of the most ravishing songs ever written for the soprano voice — a show stopper. Russalka enslaves a prince. In the end she gets him and drowns him in the river, but not before she has sung this song.

For our pleasure on stage swept Brigida Bzinkiewic, gowned like a super-model to sing this song. A six-footer, blonde and impressive, she gave her incantation to the moon in a very interesting dark, slumberous voice which had exactly the right timbre for the music — a nymph to reckon with.

Rimsky wrote a pop hit called *Song of India* out of his opera *Sadko*. It became tea time, lunch time, bed time music for the world. In this version at the opera, no soprano sang it and it was an orchestral arrangement — a strange oversight with Bzinkiewic to do it.

Leoncavallo's Vesti la Guibba from the opera *Pagliacci* brought the tenor to break his heart before the audience. And then came the lunging Czardas from Johann Strauss's comic opera *Die Fledermaus*. The soprano polished it off with great style, producing some brilliant, piercing top notes of bonus. She had a voice to cope with her appearance.

Between each vocal item El-Saedi and the orchestra went through Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* and the Smetana wild and furious ones from the opera *The Bartered Bride*.

Following the first Hungarian rumpus entered Brigida Bzinkiewic. She had come out to sing the exhausting *Doll Song* from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* — a *coloratura* fire bomb. The house gasped as she entered, a doll going on for seven-foot tall dressed as a ballerina in tu-tu skirt, ballerina legs, perfect ones in her case, on point. Baby Land hair style, ribbons and bows, she brought her own major domo in military uniform to wind up her machinery as the aria began. And what an aria. The *Doll Song* is long. It goes high and florid, into *altissimo* regions, and our dolly had it all as well as the physique of a basket-ball hero. Offenbach had way out tastes. He would have adored her.

The concert ended with the old five-star hotel after dinner lyric *Non ti Scordar di me*, sung as a duet by Montané and the doll once again as herself. Apart from a few sharp high notes, she had sung a star performance. Other qualifications: she is a Miss Poland prize-winner and runner-up in Miss Universe, a highly decorated pianist from the Warsaw Conservatoire and an international performer on TV. Interesting what one might find at the opera.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Mohsen Shaalan
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Erhard Wehrmann
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 3 Oct.
Black and white photographs under the title Artist Portraits, taken between 1962 and 1995 of Alberto Giocometti, Wilfredo Lam, Ossip Zadkine, Henry Moore and Kumi Sugai, among others.

Sayed Mohamed Sayed (Paintings)
Monet Gallery, 6 Abul Thamin Sq, off Tanta St, Mohandessin. Tel 345 3894. Daily 10am-3pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 9 Oct.

Adly Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Opening: 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16 Oct. Meeting with the artist 4 Oct, 7pm.

Sobhi Guirguis (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Opening 23 Sept, 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 17 October.

1952, The Last Protocol: Official Coverage of Egypt's Royal Family at Work and Play
Sony Gallery for Still Photography, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Opening 7 Oct, 8pm. Until 23 Oct.
Thirty-six black and white stills taken by court photographers Karim Zakhary, Hanselman, Dores, Arman, Weinberg, Archak, Schoefft, Alban and the late Riad Shehata. The collection surveys the protocol of the Egyptian Royal Court during the reigns of King Farouk and King Fouad.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, language studies department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. 7-23 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Opening: 6 Oct, 8pm. Until 23 Oct.
On display are works by Hussein Becar, Mostafa Hussein and Makram Hunein.

Susanne Popelka (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. 7-30 Oct.
New works portraying masks, eyes and bodies.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

4 Oct, 6.30pm: **Film Di Ordinaria Follia**, directed by M. Ferreri.
5 Oct, 6.30pm: **La Grande Abbuffata** (1973) directed by M. Ferreri and starring Marcello Mastroianni.

Spanish Films
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 395 2326.
5 Oct, 9pm: **Nadie Hablará de Nosotras** (1996), directed by Augustina Diaz Yanes.
8 Oct, 9pm: **Tesis** (1997), directed by Alejandro Amenábar.

Torasan's Song of Love
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 2 Oct, 6pm.
Directed by Yoji Yamada (1983).

Russian Films
Pushkin Centre for Russian Culture, 127 El-Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 360 6371.

Russian and Egyptian film screenings every Monday at 7pm.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Lost World
El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Steven Spielberg's sequel to Jurassic Park promises more spine chilling dinosaur chases and even better special effects.

Volcano
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show.
Following the tradition of natural disaster movies, is a huge production starring Tommy Lee Jones.

The Saint
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Val Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue.

Double Team
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

El-Qobtan (The Captain)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797.

El-Mar'a Wel-Satour (The Woman and the Cleaver)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm.
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssef Chahine's latest mega-production, starring Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida, Safeiya El-Emari and a large, young, aesthetically pleasing cast.

Erhard Wehrmann

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 2 Oct, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 2 Oct, 8pm.
Italian compositions performed by soloists Nashwa Ibrahim, Gihan El-Nasser, Claude Rathle, Ramez Labad and Gihan Morsi.

Orientals
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 3 Oct, 8pm.
Fathy Salama and his group perform.

Don Pasquale
Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6935. 30 Sept, 3 Oct, 8pm.
Gaetano Donizetti's comic opera in three acts will be performed in English by the Akhnaton Chamber Opera Company.

In Memory of Gaetano Donizetti
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 4 Oct, 8pm.
In celebration of the bicentenial birthday of the Italian musician, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Carlo Magni and accompanied by soloists Stefania Donzelli (soprano), Maria Scogna (mezzosoprano), Stefano Secco (tenor), Roberto Cruciani (tenor), Riccardo Marcucci (baritone) and Davide Ruberti (bass) performs selections from Don Pasquale, Lucia di Lammermoor and L'Elisir d'Amore.

Duet Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 5 Oct, 8pm.
Naila Magdorfa and Golnar Golizada perform.

Kathak Dance and Hindustani Flute
Gomhouriya Theatre, as above. 5 Oct. 8pm.

Vocal Quintet from Mexico
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 6 Oct, 8pm.

The Osiris Singers
Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6935. 8 Oct, 8pm.
The AUC Chamber Choir, directed by Larry Catlin, will perform selections from the musical *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *The Sound of Music*.

THEATRE

El-Darafil (The Dolphins)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 7pm. Until 16 Oct.
Scripted by Khaled EL-Sawi, directed by Hassan Abdou and performed by the Theatre Atelier Company.

Bahloul Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Croumb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm
Said Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Tarnima II (Melody II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Entessar Abdel-Fattah.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

Senouhi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Ahmed Fouad Selim and directed by Teymour Abashedzi.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.
With Mohamed Anani and Hamada Abdel-Halim, directed by Mamdouh Aql.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.
With Lucy, Sherif Mounir, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Mohamed Heneidi and Alaa Waleyeddin; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Nasser Abdel-Moneim.

LECTURES

A Roman Red Sea Restaurant? Berenike 1997
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 2 Oct, 5.30pm.
Lecure by Ms Willeke Wendrich from the NIAASC.

The Nile in Greek Sources
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 2 Oct, 6.30pm.
Guest of honour Professor C. Gallazzi, Dr Alia Hanafi and Farouk El-Qadi present Dr Abul-Yusr Farah's book by the same title. The presentation will be followed by the projection of the screen adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, starring Marlon Brando, James Mason and directed by J. L. Mankiewicz.

1952, The Last Protocol
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. 7 Oct, 7pm.
In conjunction with the photographic exhibition at the Sony Gallery, Dr Maged Farag presents his recently published collection of photographs by the same title, researched, designed and edited by himself.

The Romantic Garden in Italy: Ninfa
Italian Cultural Institute, as above. 8 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture and slide projection by Giuppi Sgaravatti Pietromarchi.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

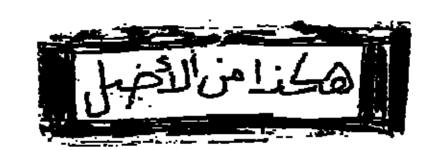
ABSTRACTION is the keynote of paintings and graphic works by members of the Golden Triangle Society on show at the **Atelier du Caire**. The artists exhibiting are: **Abdel-Rahman Attiya, Abdel-Razaq Abdel-Moneim, Mohamed Kamal, Raif Wassfi** and **Wahid el-Belqashi**.

Shawqi Rizq

Al-Hanager Art Gallery hosts 42 huge works in a variety of materials by **Shawqi Rizq**. These involve a simplification of forms, decorative in tendency and drawing their inspiration from ancient art.

Collages, drawings, murals and sculptures by school children are on show at the **Small Hall of the Opera House**. These works make use of a plethora of materials including bits of newspaper and display a spontaneity that is at once moving and evocative.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



Auguste Mariette put all his experience in the new-born discipline of Egyptology into designing the first production of *Aida*. And if next week's production in Luxor has not aspired to the same standards of 'authenticity', no less effort has been involved, writes **Jane Dunford**





Above, costume designs from the original production of *Aida*, and below, their 1997 counterparts

A real-life costume drama

A copy of the crown worn by the Egyptian princess Amneris for the premiere of *Aida* in December 1871, created by the Armenian jeweller Onnig Alixaniane, is soon to be presented to the Cairo Opera House. Although only a replica, the golden, jewelled crown surmounted by a cobra, which was made in 1960, will have special significance — all the original costumes and accessories have long since disappeared, almost without trace.

Designed by the French Egyptologist Mariette and based on historical sources and bas-reliefs, the costumes and set for the original production of *Aida* were made in Paris. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war left Mariette stranded in the French capital and contributed to the production's failure to meet the intended premiere date, the inauguration of the Cairo Opera House in 1869.

Mariette spent months in Philae Temple minutely studying the details of ancient costume. He also borrowed heavily from the work of earlier archaeologists, such as Prisse d'Avennes, in his quest for authenticity. His work apparently paid off, the proof of the pudding being the discovery, by Howard Carter, in 1926, of an actual trumpet, virtually identical to those produced as props for the first *Aida*.

Violet Makkar, the first Egyptian soprano to play Amneris, remembered the original costumes.

"I sang Amneris in Belgrade in 1964, by that date obviously the originals were not being used. But the original costumes that I remember seeing in the Opera House struck me as not totally Egyptian [pharaonic]. I felt there was a distinct Graeco-Roman influence."

No one seems quite sure what became of Mariette's costumes. Did they simply disintegrate with time? Were they burnt in the fire that destroyed the Old Opera House in 1971?

"With the march of time the costumes were renovated and used in other productions, but gradually they wore out or disappeared," said Dr Saleh Abdoun, director of the Old Opera House from 1966-1971.

"Previous directors told of how King Farouk used to go up to the hall where things were kept after performances, other high ranking officials had access, so many people passed through over the years... who knows what disappeared? There was no record of what was kept. Still many, many costumes remained. I was working on a museum where they would have been on display, but the fire destroyed them all, along with the archives and music scores."

Copies of the original sketches for the costumes survive in the Biblioteque Nationale de Paris and in his book commemorating the 100th anniversary of *Aida*, finished just a month before the fire destroyed vital archive material, Dr Abdoun details correspondence between the Opera House's director Draneht Bey, Mariette, the Parisian tailors contracted to make the costumes and Verdi, revealing the process and pressures under which they were made. In the week before the first *Aida* went on stage, unfinished costumes were hurriedly completed in Cairo. Draneht Bey asked the municipality to supply the workshop with extra gas for lamps so that his team could work through the night to meet the deadline.

One hundred and twenty five years later and the upstairs workshop at Cairo Opera House probably bears a striking resemblance to seamstress Delphine Baron's frantic Paris atelier in 1870.

Just a week before dress rehearsals for *Aida 1997* began, the final touches were being put to the multitude of costumes. For more than six months a team of 30 have beavered away, hand-sewing jewels, sequins and braid, pressing delicate fabrics, dying shoulder pads. As in the 19th century, the 1,000 different outfits were made from scratch, but the material used for 1997's production is entirely Egyptian.

"*Aida* has been performed hundreds of times but few costumes were owned by the Opera House and in the past they have been rented. In 1994, for example, Rossi's costumes were only leased to us," said Hassan Kami, production manager of the performance.

Where Mariette turned to temples, Kami and his colleagues, acclaimed Italian director Attilio Colonnello and assistant director Giovanni Armento, looked to films, history and past productions for inspiration. Radames' glorious golden costume, complete with cloak, decorated collar and dress, was based on La Coste's design for a production of *Aida* in 1872.



photos: Sherif Sonbol

"In some ways the costumes have as many Pharaonic elements as the originals, we have had more to draw on since then. But this is a new conception altogether, we spent many, many hours perfecting it," said Kami.

"We wanted something genuinely Egyptian, using the colours of Ancient Egypt, primarily blue and gold, and the Hatshepsut Temple is integral to the design. For some scenes modern *galabiyas* are worn. There is a slightly futuristic element to the set and some of the costumes — it's geometrical, the lines are simple and modern. There is a sculptural feel to the production, but above all the costumes and set are completely Egyptian."

After visiting the country two years ago, Colonnello and Armento decided with Kami that the costumes should be made in Cairo, both for convenience and cost — the budget allocated for costumes was $70,000.

Bargaining at Khan El-Khalili followed for the thousands of metres of Egyptian cotton, silk and other fabrics that have been used. Even the footwear was bought at the market.

"We had done several productions of *Aida* in Italy in the past, but this time is very different, everything is original and it is Egyptian through and through," said Armento.

Props and scenery for the 2,500 square metre stage were executed by Dr Mahmoud Mabrouk, professor of sculpture at Helwan University. Hundreds of carved stone sculptures had to be transported on a specially rented train to Luxor.

"When Khedive Ismail asked Verdi for something particularly Egyptian, that was what he received. More than a century later Italians are working again with Egyptians. It worked then, let's hope the Italian-Egyptian mix succeeds once more this year," said Armento.

Plain Talk

As I grow older, I find that I spend more of my time in sedentary activities such as reading. Perhaps this is just a function of the reduced mobility that comes with age. Reading, though, gives vent to the imagination. This, I think, is why I spend so much time browsing through publishers' lists, avidly searching for new reading material.

I was always interested in acquainting myself with the works and achievements of outstanding personalities. In recent years, though, I have more or less given up on fiction, preferring instead to spend my reading time acquiring information about and insight into the lives and ideas of people I always respected.

This is perhaps why I was eager to glance through the list of forthcoming titles from the AUC Press. I was not let down: the coming year will witness the publication of, among other things, two volumes which promise to provide food for thought. These are: *An Architecture For People: The Complete Works of Hassan Fathi* by James Steele and *The Voice of Egypt: Um Kulthum, Arabic Song, And Egyptian Society in The Twentieth Century* by Virginia Danielson.

The first volume, as the title suggests, concerns Hassan Fathi's project to establish a coherent, economic and attractive vernacular style suitable for low-cost housing projects. Fathi's ideas have been vastly influential throughout the Third World.

Certainly, as early as the 1950s Fathi was being hailed as a visionary. I well remember an article that appeared in the *Architectural Review* of 1956 by Raymond Mortimer. Entitled 'A Model Village in Upper Egypt', the article began: "An architecture in which the claims of convenience, hygiene and economy have been so imaginatively satisfied that the result is beauty — this, though it sounds too good to be true, is what I found last spring in a village in Upper Egypt."

Mortimer goes on to criticise Egyptians who seem "to despise their own civilisation, once so nobly expressed in buildings, furniture and clothes; and they take from the West chiefly what we occidentals deplore as vulgar and ridiculous. It was a surprise, therefore, to come upon a village near Luxor that revealed a conspicuous imagination and good taste. I succeeded in meeting its architect, an Egyptian named Hassan Fathi Bey; and I spent a night in one of its houses, which enabled me to appreciate the refinement of the proportions of these apparently simple buildings... so far from disfiguring the landscape, the village will take its place serenely on the road between the river and the Ramesseum and foreign visitors will realise that Egyptian art has a present as well as a past."

The great pity, of course, is that Fathi's architecture, originally intended for the rural poor, has now become the prerogative of the urban rich who have co-opted his rustic idiom in the building of their weekend villas.

As examples, I can cite the case of Tunis, an artists' village in Fayoum, and the Hassan Fathi Village, a seaside resort on the North Coast. The former, though a joy to behold, stands out in the midst of the villagers' dwellings which are anything but Hassan Fathi.

It is in the North Coast resort that you see Fathi's style travestied and turned to quick profit. Given the kudos associated with his name and architectural vocabulary, the contractors have built an entire village in what appears to be Hassan Fathi environment-friendly style; however, the houses, clustered close together, are made of concrete and thus defeat the whole concept.

The second title is about another very Egyptian personality, the singer Umm Kulthoum. But it is more than a biography of the great Egyptian diva, serving also as a chronicle of the cultural and social history of the nation in the present century.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Cinema

Double take, double standards

What attracts audiences into the cinema? What is it they want to see? **Khairiya El-Beshlawi** ponders the questions that weigh heavy on producers and directors alike

We might as well be honest about this: the criteria by which we judge and assess new foreign films are by no means the same as those used when dealing with Arabic films, not even when the film in question, as in the case of *Tuffaha* (A Girl Called Apple), happens to have been presented with the Golden Pyramid Award at the Cairo International Film Festival. And placing critical jargon aside, it seems to me important to note that the spontaneous, subjective reactions of spectators to Western films and to Arabic ones are widely divergent, reflecting differences both in cinematic traditions and the aesthetic criteria by which they are assessed.

Such differences underlie what constitutes, in effect, a set of double-standards on the part of the viewer, who applies one set of criteria in judging local films and another for films from more cinematically developed countries. But without this duality in place, how on earth can one view a film like *Tuffaha* after watching the beautifully executed Italian *Il Postino*, which was screened immediately before *Tuffaha* in one movie house, or the American film *The Bridges of Madison County*, directed by Clint Eastwood, who plays the lead opposite Meryl Streep?

It was quite by chance, and the vagaries of video tape availability, that I happened to watch all three films in the space of 24 hours. There are some common denominators — all three are, for instance, romantic films that tackle male-female relationships from a socio-economic viewpoint. Yet there is little point in comparing the three in terms of either form or content. The intellectual and emotional pleasure to be had from a beautifully made film is an altogether different experience from watching a film that purports to celebrate beauty and love in the gaudiest and crassest of ways — the difference between the two being roughly analogous to listening to a virtuoso playing an instrument and someone else banging haphazardly on drums.

The picture becomes a little more complicated, however, when we take into consideration the fact that the audience tends to favour the local — and in the opinion of critics, vulgar — product over sophisticated foreign works, even when these come with the cache of multiple Oscar awards. It would appear, too, that the kind of cinema which a film like *Tuffaha* represents is the utmost Egyptian directors can do given that they address an audience whose taste has been shaped by what one might term the "cinema-cabaret". After all, directors' dependence on the box office apart, the cinematic packaging of ideas must be in keeping with the taste and awareness of the audience.

It seems to me that cinemagoers in Egypt fall into two categories, categories that are, to all intents and purposes, absolutely exclusive. The larger portion of the audience consumes local cinema in a laid back manner, and with the least possible effort. As for foreign cinema, this category of audience favours films in which action at break-neck speed, a show of muscles and technological bravado are the most exalted elements. The other, much smaller category of viewers comprises those who demand intellectually stimulating films, to whose number might be added the video-audience whose sheer size, if nothing else, is an important determining factor in the commercial success or failure of any film. (Having frequented a number of video-clubs in different areas, I have noticed the wide, but "invisible popularity" of films that sank without trace at the box-office.)



***Tuffaha* — "Once upon a time there was Leila Oloui..."**

To move to *Tuffaha*. The opening sequences of the film form a convincing testimony to author-director Raafat El-Mihi's finesse and good taste. Unfortunately, this initial impression is increasingly undermined as the film progresses and the plot unfolds. At the outset, we see a young couple on their wedding day: Tuffaha (whose name meaning apple, is redolent with symbolism), a beautiful, vivacious, sensual woman, played by Leila Oloui, and Hassan, played by Maged El-Masri, the acme of virility. Tuffaha is as attractive to men as Hassan is to women.

The bustling, teeming, discordant urban environment that is Cairo is imbued with the harmonious, colourful hues of love that the lovers project. The narrow bed in their cramped room on the roof of an old building thus metaphorically expands to include an entire world. On the roof, the bride prances around, shakes her hips and blatantly flaunts her sexual fulfilment in front of her miserable neighbours. She has lengthy, fanciful dialogues with the Atlas figures bearing the globe atop the Tiring building. It is as if she has tapped into the myth the figures represent and recognises the power of myth and imagination in offering an escape from poverty, cramped living quarters and the collapse of the wardrobe which her fantasy transforms into a fridge, a freezer and other consumer durables that she does not own.

The first few minutes of the film, acting very much like the backdrop to a tale narrated by a wandering minstrel, are executed with care and serve to create a cheerful atmosphere. However, after this promising beginning, the sense of harmony is dissipated and the film gradually slips away from the early, high expectations it had engendered, particularly as the plot progresses and both Tuffaha and her husband, Hassan, become the target of various conspiracies. Yet despite the fact that she is a cleaning woman in one of the ministries and he makes pancakes in a shop in Al-Hussein, the early message of the film is that such 'lowly' socio-economic status does not preclude contentment, or the savouring of the riches love can bring.

Yet around the two lovers there exists a hell of sorts, a hell that is constituted by other people whose actions transform the two lovers into sacrifices on the alter of desires that are not their own. Interestingly, though, El-Mihi does not cast the conflict within the all-too-familiar context of the socio-economic dichotomy between haves and have-nots, but casts it instead as a battle between those who, armed with love, are equipped to defend and enjoy their right to live, and those who are emotionally impoverished but have other weapons with which to destroy and/or use the love they lack to their own advantage.

The conflict assumes mythic, and at times almost farcical dimensions, that transcend simple realism but which refrain from entering the realm of pure fantasy. The conspiracy thus becomes an asinine mockery of the evils wreaked by those who possess power on those who do not. And despite all the scheming and plotting, the unexpected, perhaps a little predictably, occurs.

The many ideas which El-Mihi is trying to put across in this film are perfectly familiar, and lend themselves, perfectly plausibly, to any number of different genres. El-Mihi opted, as is his wont, for satirical comedy, which in *Tuffaha* he has adapted in to a form of mythic narrative along the lines of "once upon a time there was a woman called Leila Oloui..."

Yet despite the fact that the story begins with an actress whose name and features we know intimately, she here becomes Tuffaha. If nothing else, this film celebrates the power of the imagination, particularly Egyptian imagination. It is the Egyptian imagination that formulated Abdel-Wahab's lyrics which we hear on the sound track, that produced all the legendary film-star posters of whom are pinned up on the wall of the room where Tuffaha and Hassan make love, that yielded the popular idiom that incorporates not just sexual allusions but humour and wit.

And yet the elements of comic relief incorporated in the film act regularly to undercut the emotionally charged and potentially tragic moments of the film, as when Tuffaha is falsely charged with madness, or when it is suggested that her assumed naiveté is belied by her power to dream and her awareness of the value of the myth represented by the Atlas figures. And the acting of Oloui, El-Masri and Hala Sidqi was, in many instances, marred by their melodramatic delivery.

The excessive sexual allusions, from the poster to the closing sequence of the film, while characteristic of the author-director's fixations, was also conditioned by the need to ensure success at the box office. There is also a rather naive belief in fateful coincidence — a barren woman can suddenly conceive, while another loses the power overnight, and a Sudanese fortune-teller can correctly foresee the death of another character. On the other hand, the film also leaves scope for scientific predictions in the form of medical prognoses.

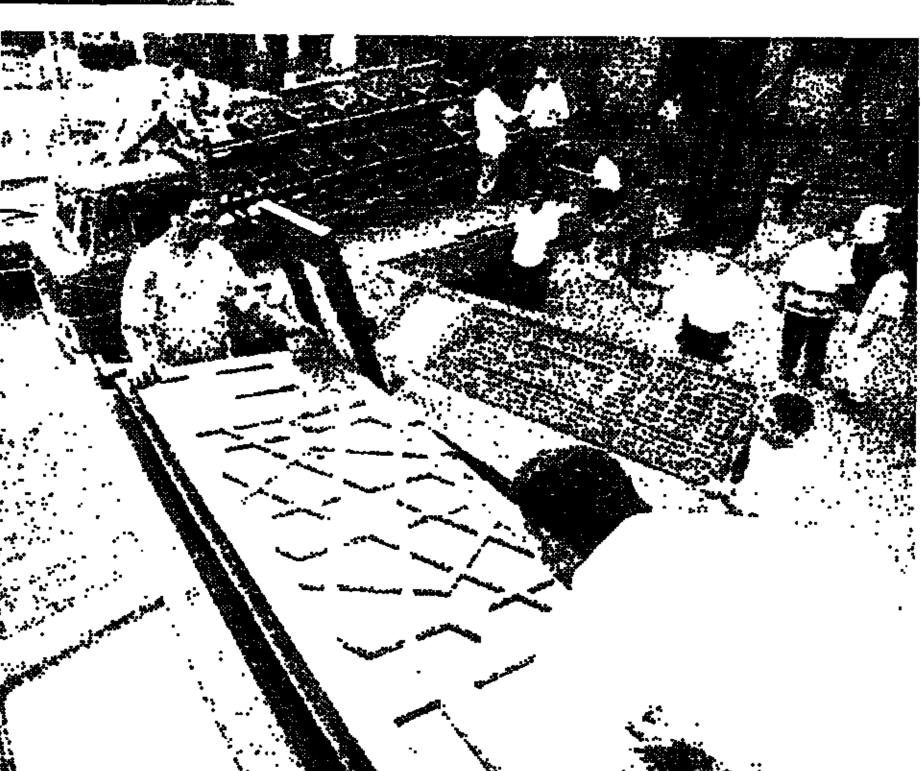
Tuffaha, in the end, represents a mixed bag of incoherent narratives that together give rise to a number of unreal situations. All in all, the film represents a symptom and one that, despite the awards, cannot automatically be viewed as healthy.

Al-Ahram Weekly



photos: Salah Ibrahim

The Arabic Music Institute: preparing for a complete overhaul. The *mashrabiya* doors and windows, having been identified and marked accordingly, are removed to be cleaned and refurbished





The sound of music

The Arabic Music Institute has witnessed far more glamorous times: Salah Jahin's first puppet show, or Umm Kulthoum's legendary concerts. But while decades have passed since women in furs and men in bow ties last emerged from limos and made their way into the gilded hall, writes Fayza Hassan, there is still hope for the building itself

The Arabic Music Institute on Ramses Street was built between 1921 and 1926 by architects Verocci, Pasteur, Farag Amin and Tawfiq Shar. *Al-Musawwar* of 16 February 1926 reported on the imminent inauguration of the new building by King Fouad: "In a matter of days, His Majesty will officially inaugurate the charming and awe-inspiring edifice constructed by the Eastern Music Institute on Queen Nazli Street, which will serve as its headquarters now. The old building is beneath the Institute's standing, and too small to accommodate its many members. The new headquarters, on the other hand, one of the most majestic of the capital's newer edifices, is built in a lovely Arabic style, while the main theatre is painted in a manner which bewitches the observer."

While the building is in a sorry state of disrepair, reminders of its former beauty have not disappeared altogether. The entrance portal was designed on a diagonal square grid to increase the exposure to pedestrians approaching the building from the east, a trait alien to common Cairene architectural practice, according to Tarek Saqr (*Early Twentieth-Century Islamic Architecture in Cairo*, AUC Press, 1992). Saqr notes that a similar design can be found in the monumental portal of the *madrasa* of Sultan Hassan (1356-61), "which was set at an angle to the rest of the façade so that it might be visible from the Citadel." The Institute's entrance portal is in the form of a monumental pointed horseshoe, with a ribbed dome of Mameluke inspiration above the doorway adding majesty to the ensemble. The building is richly decorated in a harmonious mixture of Mameluke and Ottoman styles.

Mention the Arabic Music Institute, and most people will remember the fact that Salah Jahin's first puppet show took place in its theatre, but it witnessed many other events. Traditional Arabic music was taught at the Institute; the walls of its intimate yet impressive theatre may have echoed with the first violin strings plucked by the most famous of Egyptian singers, Abdel-Halim Hafez, who practiced the instrument at the Institute. These same walls once gleamed with a multitude of designs of Islamic inspiration in brilliant reds, blues and gold, but these splendid colours, like the notes of the dark nightingale's violin, are pale echoes of their former selves.

Many other celebrities made their debuts there, on the stage above which one can read the name of King Fouad I and the date — 1923 — in faded gold. "Even Umm Kulthoum sang here," said Hamdi Ramadan, an independent consultant in charge of the restoration work.

In the 1980s, the Institute relinquished its functions and became the Farid El-Atrash Theatre. A series of prefabricated rooms, housing the offices of the theatre, were appended to the original building, an unsightly growth which seemed to be spreading until restoration began.

While the Institute has not emerged unscathed from the neglect which appears to befall all Egyptian popular theatres' fixtures and fittings, hints of its former grace remain, if only in the proportions of its halls. The damage is so extensive, however, that one is at a loss trying to visualise Cairo's *beau monde* dressed in their evening best, alighting from chauffeured limousines to attend a concert. The dust covering the theatre, the refuse piled high in corners, hold faint memories of past splendour. One can only hope that this precious example of neo-Islamic architecture, recently reclaimed by the administration of the Opera House, will be given a new lease of life.

The restoration work has just begun. Last week, passersby had a chance to observe *mushrabiya* windows, heavily carved wooden doors and the chairs of the theatre being loaded somewhat unceremoniously onto trucks. These fixtures have been entrusted to architect Assad Nadim, best-known for his restoration work on *mashrabiya*, who will have them refurbished in his factory. Nadim's son Adham was supervising the removal and the identification of each item, which will be cleaned, repaired and replaced.

"Soon you will not be able to recognise this theatre," said Ramadan optimistically, "but it will take a great deal of work," he added, surveying the devastation.



Where do you go to, my lovely?

Like my mother, my husband belonged to the old school, and insisted on treating his servants as exactly that. My mother still believes that our stations in life are preordained and that we are dished out what we deserve; as for my husband, he died before being told how politically incorrect he had been all his life. Not that he would have paid the least attention but, having missed out on the discourse of the '80s, he was spared the look of scorn cast by the young generation on anyone stating that "these people" have to be kept in their place. After my husband's death, things changed considerably in our home, as we decided to bridge the social gap between our new maid, Karima, and us, her employers. At first, Karima showed a measure of surprise at the realisation that we were placing no specific boundaries on her presence or rights, but managed to adapt with commendable alacrity to the new employer/employee relationship. She was allowed to come and go as she pleased, my daughter arguing that she, too, needed time to herself, and was soon arriving late and leaving early without so much as an excuse. Although functionally illiterate, she was technology-friendly and enjoyed natural affinities with telephones, televisions, VCRs, sound systems, A/Cs and kitchen appliances. She used hot water with abandon in winter and turned air conditioners on automatically as she went along in summer. She often forgot one or the other on when she left a room, but only giggled when reminded that she had left water running or the lights on. Our electricity bills soared to untold heights, a point I was shy to raise with my daughter, fearing that she would brand me *ancien régime* like my mother and my late husband.

Karima's eating patterns also adapted themselves quickly and with ease to the new situation, undergoing a total transformation. No longer did she even consider choosing the humble white cheese for her breakfast. She needed breadsticks, butter, French cheeses, an omelette perhaps and salads, preferably seasoned with wine vinegar, washed down with numerous cups of instant coffee and milk, which she drank in my favourite mug when she thought I was not looking. Soon she gave up lunching on rice and stew, having discovered that a few bananas, apples and mangoes — when in season — made for a healthier meal than the more ordinary fare. She always chose the fresher fruit, carefully leaving us any over-ripe banana or wrinkled apple. When I forgot to fill the fruit basket, she would ask me with a sweet smile to remember to call on the greengrocer, because we were all out of lemons.

The day I saw my daughter counting her cigarettes with a frown, I guessed that our Karima had taken up smoking as well, a fact confirmed by my neighbour upstairs, who, as a full-time mum, often gets bored and entertains herself by looking through her window into my apartment. "Your maid," she told me, "puts music on and dances all day — when she is not lounging on the couch drinking tea and smoking." I almost told her that Karima usually drank coffee, not tea, but refrained, as she commented that, since my daughter and I both worked, we could not reasonably expect our maid to behave any better.

My daughter, still a staunch supporter of upward mobility, pursued her programme undaunted, and Karima was provided with last season's dresses, a gift which undoubtedly raised the young woman's awareness of her physical attributes and the need to enhance them. Using my daughter as a model, she spent long hours in our bathrooms, emptying on her hair, face and body the contents of all these lovely little bottles for which we had paid an eye and a tooth. As she departed at the end of her working day, a familiar fragrance usually lingered in the apartment, not entirely unlike the one left by my daughter when she goes to a party.

Recently, we began talking about locking up "just a few things" and I suggested that we could leave a couple of packs of cheaper cigarettes around, since mine, a low tar/low nicotine brand, are generally difficult to find. If we do it too obviously, however, she may leave, I warned. But I suspect that Karima will be leaving soon anyway. The other night, the phone rang quite late. "I am really sorry to bother you," said an impeccably polite young male voice, "but may I speak to Karima?" I almost told him that he had the wrong number, when I remembered our maid. "Karima who?" I asked, only half-believing what I was

hearing. "Karima, your daughter," he answered, after hesitating for a split second. "Am I calling too late?" I was about to enlighten him in no uncertain words, when I thought better of it. "Not at all," I said gaily. "Karima is at a party, but I will give you the number of her mobile." I waited a few seconds and then gently hung up.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Biscuits and cream

Ingredients:
1 cup of instant coffee (sweetened)
1/2 kg whipped cream
3 egg yolks
1/2 kg ladies' fingers biscuits *(langue de chat)*
2 tbsp. white honey
Some dried granules of instant coffee (optional)
Vanilla

Method:
Immerse the biscuits one by one in the cup of sweetened coffee and place in a rectangular pyrex dish. After forming one layer of biscuits, add a layer of whipped cream, already mixed with the honey, egg yolks and vanilla. Repeat the process, alternating layers until you reach the top, which should be a layer of cream. Melt 3 tbsp. of sugar and add 3 tbsp. of water to make a caramel topping, then sprinkle it on top. Alternatively, sprinkle some granules of instant coffee over the cream instead. Refrigerate for 24 hours and serve chilled, cut into squares.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Smile in the aisles

Andrew Steele grins for his supper

Thailand prides itself on being "the land of smiles", or so their airline would have it anyhow, and no shortage of said facial gymnastics is to be found in Thailandia, recently opened below Kandahar and Raoucha in Mohandessin. No shortage of wicker either, be it posing as a coaster, or in the guise of a table mat. Why, even the spindly love seats are crafted of the stuff! The decoration is predictable, if mercifully understated. Filigree wall brackets contrive to support sloped ceiling paneling. Thai temple art leaps and bounds across the walls. The obligatory blue and white crockery, including an unorthodox 'toothpick duck', abounds.

Service with a smile, as I've opined, and swift and discreet it was too, the heavy, glitzy menus proffered and drinks orders taken almost before one could say rice cake. A long, if not desperately eclectic menu: some 60 items of shrimp, pork, beef and chicken, and a selection of surreal puddings, promising perverse uses for coconut and intriguing "red" or "blue" sauces.

Hot ones, cold ones or wet ones. These are the parametres of starter fare. We decided to forgo the soups in favour of Sa-Te Neua, Thot Man Kung, and Yam Kai Yang: skewered beef, deep-fried prawn cakes and chicken and lemon juice salad, respectively. The hatch window to the kitchen snapped open and a reassuringly Thai face proffered Oriental delicacies to the waiter. Was she smiling? I should really counter: "Of course she was!" but it was actually more of a grimace. Her wares, however, certainly put a grin on our collective lips, the beef Sa-Te being impossibly tender and savoury. A strong lemony marinade had insinuated itself into the flesh. Minced prawn and shredded coconut filled the prawn cakes, which had been expertly battered to within an inch of their lives. The chicken salad was red hot and toothsome, not to mention heavy on the lemon grass (where do they find it?) Dishes of hot, chewy peanut sauce, and hot, chewy tomato concasse accompanied.

The main course was equally expert: Kean Khiao Wan Neua, Pha Naeng Kai, and Kao Phat Pak Ruam, to give it its full and illustrious nomenclature. Peanuts, coconut, and the by now inevitable lemon grass gave gusto to the Pha Naeng Chicken. Baby corn, mushrooms, and ornately sculpted carrot perked up the rice, but the one to remember was the green curry. The beef was nothing to get excited about, but the thin, heavily spiced greenish broth was divine. One to take the enamel off your teeth, mind, really quite blisteringly hot.

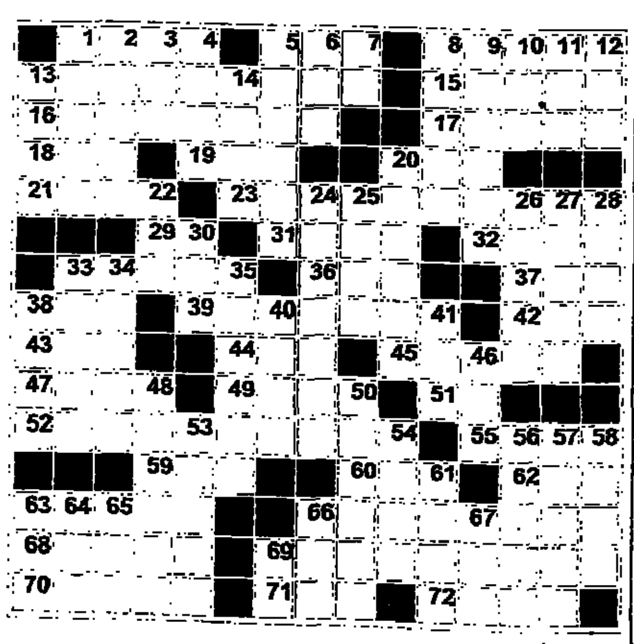
A jolly nice bite then, the portions of a proper, rather than large size, and the whole served with suitable intervals and some finesse. Unfortunately, the trek to the lavatory involves a sally into the rather dank corridors of the Sphinx Plaza shopping mall, but this can be tolerated. Dinner for two with two Stellas comes in at a fair to middling LE 105. Beaming is obviously compulsory.

Thailandia, The Sphinx Plaza Mall, 3 Midan Sphinx, Mohandessin
Tel: 3044405

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

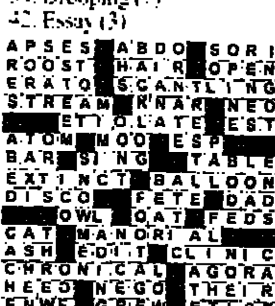


ACROSS
1. Balladmonger (4)
5. Remote (3)
8. Make a speech (5)
13. Public institution where needy receive food and lodging for various tasks (9)
15 Mediterranean finch (5)
16. Investigation (8)
17. Piece let into a dress (5)
18. Certificate of quality, abb. (3)
19. Comb. form "modern" (3)
20. ...gratias (3)
21. English river (4)
23. Cutlery (10)
29. Sun god (2)
31. Grim fate (4)
32. Yuletide (4)
33. One corner of a square (5)
36. Dined (3)
37. Aries (3)
38. Trades Union Organisation, abb. (3)
39. Drooping (7)
42. Essay (3)
43. Navy title, abb. (3)
44. Small deer (3)
45. Brass wind instrument, pl. (5)
47. Relaxes down (4)
49. In the manner of, L. (4)
51. University degree, abb. (2)
52. Recuperate (10)
55. Strong wind (4)
59. Lye, jumbled (3)
60. Form of meditative Buddhism (3)
62. Fellow (3)
63. Brim over (5)
66. Single; unwed (8)
68. Gladden (5)
69. Charity donor (9)
70. A rabbit; its fur (5)
71. Extinct flightless New Zealand bird (3)
72. French saints, abb. (4)

DOWN
1. The art of composing verse (5)
2. Mr Wells (5)
3. Supplement (3)
4. Prep. Used in comparison (4)
5. Relating to a type of seaweed (6)
6. Cinder (3)
7. Musical note (2)
8. Shoot of a willow (5)
9. Famous (6)
10. Hectares (3)
11. Lace (3)
12. One medical specialist, abb. (3)
13. Formal document (4)
14. Metals (4)
20. Crazy person (6)
22. Unit of work (3)
24. Members of the gun's crew (7)
25. Elect (4)
26. Main blood vessel (5)
27. Raises (5)
28. Abounding with a stately tree (4)
30. A high mountain (3)
33. The reproduction of sound (5)
34. Ancient Roman's second name (5)
35. Weirdly (6)
38. Type of powder used as lubricator (4)
40. Not a single one (4)
41. A clumsy small boat (3)
46. Purse (3)
48. Graceful (6)
50. Skin disease (6)
53. Narrow passageway (5)
54. Elongated fish (4)
56. The American aloe (5)
57. Musical instruments (5)
58. Seer (4)
61 Masonry; ridges (4)
63. Describing some wines (3)
64. An Arab political group (3)
65. Dutch or Scot for "John" (3)
66. Cent. leg. Off. (3)
67. Harness, restrain (3)
69. Before noon, abb. (2)

APSES ABDO SORI
ROOST HAIR OPEN
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CHRONICAL AGORA
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Last week's solution



هكذا من الأمل



Far more serious than any medical ailment associated with the coming of age is the sense of being alienated from the outside world.

photos: Randa Shaath

Coming of age

While Egypt celebrates the international day of the elderly on the 1st of October, there are still many question marks about their ever-changing status and rights in the Egyptian family and society. **Mariz Tadros** investigates

Step right into the retirement home of the Islamic Charity Association in *Sayeda Zaynab*, Cairo. Visitors who will lend an ear or share a cup of tea are always welcomed by residents.

Many are without family or friends and have nowhere else to go. They represent a growing percentage of elderly persons in Egypt whose circumstances have led them to seek refuge in a retirement home. The wealthier strata of the population may end up in one of Cairo's glossy private homes, others are glad to find a place free of charge at a government-regulated residence.

Perhaps you will meet 86-year-old *Umm* Salah, a great-grandmother, at the Islamic Charity home. After the home she shared with her son and his wife collapsed in 1991, the government allocated her a place in Dowe'a, in the Muqattam area. But things did not work out. "My son and his wife wanted the apartment for themselves, although I told them it was mine. My daughter-in-law and I fought. She turned my son against me so that when she kicked me out, he didn't stick by me."

Since 1992 *Umm* Salah has lived in the charity home and has not seen her son or her eldest daughter. "They have disowned me because I am living in a retirement home, I have shamed the family they say. I couldn't live with either of my two daughters, they had no room for me. I tried to find a room to rent but there was nothing within my means," she sighed.

Another resident, *Umm* Nadia, who originally came from a small village in the El-Sharqiya Governorate, was never allowed to re-marry after her husband died, even though she was still very young and had a daughter. "My brothers said that a woman whose husband dies is never supposed to marry again, it would be a disgrace," she said. Not being allowed to work either, it was her younger brother who took care of her for many years. When he died, *Umm* Nadia went to live in the home, her daughter did not have the means to care for her.



To live a life of dignity on one's own is better than to be a burden on one's family

The Islamic Charity Association has two retirement homes, one offering free accommodation, the other fee-paying, for up to 100 elderly people. Both have their own internal administration but operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs. The Association also distributes a monthly "pension" or "pension supplement" to the elderly who have their own place or are living with their families but need financial assistance.

There is a lengthy waiting list for the Association's free home, something that the main career, who spoke on condition of anonymity, is not proud of.

"We never needed retirement homes in the past, children cared more about their parents than they do now. Now they are just waiting to lay their hands on their parents' properties, it's not right. In the old days, it was considered a great dishonour for any child to be accused of neglecting the care of his parents, that has changed," she said.

On the other hand, sometimes it may be too much for the children to cope with, she concedes. "There are families where the father is 80 and his son is 60 — how is the grandson supposed to be able to take care of both of them? Many of them need special treatment and care. The problem for many of Egypt's elderly is that they really have no-one to take care of them, yet people still view retirement homes in a denigrating manner, 'orphanages', they call them," she added.

Azza Korayem, a lecturer at the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research is not surprised that retirement homes are still a relatively alien concept to Egyptians. The pressing need for elderly care today is due to the breakdown of the family, and traditional values which valued grandparents, she believes. "The elderly are no longer revered, they are no longer seen as the patriarch or matriarch of the family. Twenty or 30 years ago a wife would be damned by her own family and her husband's if she complained about her mother-in-law living with her. This is no longer the case today."

Korayem believes that the need for care of older people outside their family is a consequence of urbanisation and excessive materialism. In rural areas, she points out, there is no such thing as a retirement home, and, if it existed, no-one would send his or her parents there. Korayem explained that new social dynamics, such as the migration of children or the shortage of domestic care, are leading many elderly people to consider a retirement home.

One factor which forces some elderly people into retirement homes in Egypt is the housing shortage. "Parents are sometimes sent to retirement homes against their will or through extreme coercion by their sons who want their apartment so that they can get married," she said.

Marie Khalil, manager of the Elderly Care Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) explained that there are no government-managed retirement homes. "We prefer to implement our programmes for the elderly via private voluntary organisations (PVOs) which enjoy greater flexibility. We support these homes through financial assistance, but we expect them to supplement it through the their own personal efforts," she said.

There are 65 retirement homes operating under the auspices of the MOSA in Egypt, almost half of which are situated in Cairo. Fifteen of these are free of charge, the others ask for a modest fee. Dozens of others are commercially operated and independent of the government.

The first retirement home was built by missionaries in the 19th century and was managed by foreigners, long before the MOSA was established. Many of the MOSA-regulated homes have opened in the last 20 years to cope with the growing demand.

Elderly care became more of a social issue, contends Khalil, as the percentage of the elderly in society increased. According to official estimates, six per cent of the Egyptian population is over 60 years old, and although the percentage is still relatively low, numerically it means that there are at least four million people in this category.

It is not just that the role of the family that has changed but also that of the neighbour. For the elderly who never had their own families in the '50s and '60s, for instance, it was the next door neighbour who took care of them. Khalil said that because MOSA is coordinating with PVOs to create more places for the elderly in retirement homes, it has been accused of encouraging the breakdown of the family and providing an alternative for those who don't want to shoulder the responsibility of ageing parents. "We keep on insisting that retirement homes are only supposed to be for those who have no one to take care of them in their own environment," she said.

Another way care for the elderly is provided is through outreach home programmes. A trial project is being run in Tanta, in the Nile Delta, delivering hot meals to the elderly who cannot cook for themselves at home. Cost and transport are but two impeding obstacles.

Training of personnel to provide home care can also be problematic because of cultural obstacles. Some girls, for instance, refused to spend the night with elderly men on their own, especially in Tanta where society is more conservative than in the capital city, said Khalil.

Another MOSA project under trial has established offices offering services for the elderly in four different governorates.

"The offices are supposed to have trained officers to help people with practical needs such as cashing pensions, contacting a doctor urgently or even seeing to house renovations. If it proves successful, it will be implemented across the country."

Some elderly people don't need any particular care or assistance, they just need a decent income to live on. For the lower strata of the population, this is a real source of anxiety. The resources may be very limited and the pension insufficient.

The problem is that the MOSA-run insurance scheme offers negligible pensions, completely incompatible with the rise in the cost of living, a fact that Khalil did not deny. An elderly person may be entitled to as little as LE23 a month, although Khalil insists that the government offers additional bonuses if, for example, the person has children to support. In 1980 Sadat initiated what is now commonly known as the Sadat social security programme for those not receiving any government pension. For those still eligible for it today, it hardly exceeds LE30 a month.

Dr Abdel-Moneim Ashour, head of the Egyptian Geriatric and Gerontology Association, is most concerned about the preservation of independence of the elderly person at home. He does not believe the breakdown of the family and urbanisation are the only reasons behind the increasing demand for residential homes.

"There is still enough cohesion among families and the extended family is still important in Egypt," he said. "The problem is that there are no family support networks which back family members who have an elderly person to take care of. A programme should be implemented in which a primary career is identified [the spouse, followed by the eldest son, followed by the eldest daughter] and given information and advice on the kind of care available. Egypt particularly lacks skilled nurses — while there are thousands of people needing care, those who can provide it are few."

According to Ashour, the government should be doing much more to alleviate the medical problems associated with age. "We have enough Alzheimer's cases in the capital alone to fill the Cairo Stadium and yet they have no services, we often say that they need 36 hours of care a day because they are severely disabled."

The same problem exists for osteoporosis, a bone condition which is widespread in Egypt and around the world. "If only we could educate young women about the condition so that they don't suffer from calcium deficiency in their old age," he said. Ashour feels that the elderly, like psychiatric patients, have no advocates in Egypt, they have no representation and so are generally ignored. "They suffer from severe inertia. They are the victims of a conspiracy of silence," he protested.

It is estimated that by the year 2010, 7.2 per cent of the population will be over 60, comprising nearly five and a half million senior citizens — then it will be difficult to ignore their needs.









After retirement, resources for the majority of pensioners tend to be limited, which is reflected in a grim drop in the standard of living (top three pictures). For those who are better off, there is the Centre for Geriatric Services in Madinat Nasr. Luxurious and homely, it has a waiting list of more than 150 — some pensioners have been waiting for a place since 1994. Because of the pressing needs of the elderly, the Centre established an outreach programme, Care with Love, which trains unemployed youth to care for the elderly in their own homes

photos: Jane Dunford



Visitors to Mount Sinai take in the spectacular early morning view (main picture), while others queue for a warming drink at a mountain-top café after a cold night (below left). All provisions for the cafés, including water, have to be taken up by donkey or camel (below right). The Greek Orthodox monks at St Catherine's Monastery welcome visitors but stress their need for time to focus on their religious life (below centre)







How far from the madding crowd?

For centuries visitors have been lured by the beauty and religious importance of Mount Sinai and St Catherine's Monastery. With more tourists than ever visiting the sacred site, is it too late for plans to preserve its charm? **Jane Dunford** went to find out

Watching the sunrise from the top of Mount Sinai is like witnessing the birth of the world. For as far as the eye can see, the majestic pink granite mountains are brought to life as each peak and trough is bathed with the pale, golden glow.

There's just one thing which distracts from the awesome view... fellow tourists, and there are plenty of them gathered to see dawn break. They come with the territory and so, unfortunately, does their litter; plastic bottles, tissues and biscuit packets find their way into the most unlikely nooks and crannies.

But still, nothing could destroy the powerful feeling of mysticism and history which shrouds the 2,285m-high mountain, where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments, and which Christians, Jews and Muslims alike hold sacred. And with the wheels of the St Catherine Protectorate — first set up in 1988 — now being put into motion, concerted efforts are being made to preserve the compelling atmosphere.

The contrast between the desolation of the rugged mountains in the heart of the desert and the hectic world back in Cairo could not be more drastic, yet the 450km journey took just five hours by car. We crawled through the traffic-congested northern suburbs of the capital until we hit the open road to the Suez Tunnel. With no sign of damage to roads caused by Sinai floods last winter, we cruised south along the west coast road, turning east through the Feiran Oasis to St Catherine's town.

An almost full moon lit the deserted mountain as we followed the longer, less steep of two possible routes to the chapel-topped summit. The tortuous 3,500 Steps of Repentance were saved for our descent.

Sleeping on the mountain, rather than in one of the handful of hostels, hotels and camps below, is a romantic, but freezing, option — despite the blankets which can be rented from cafés on the top. And sleep remains evasive, especially as groups of tourists begin to arrive from around 3am, treading over sleeping bodies, singing hymns and listening to Walkmans — sunrise as usual on *Gabal Moussa*: rush hour on the mountain.

"The summer is the worst, sometimes there is not even a place to sit up here, 400 people come every morning but they don't stay long. It gets quieter during the day and then before sunset people arrive again," said Mahmoud Moussa, the Bedouin owner of one of the mountain-top cafés. "Its not bad the tourism, it's good for business and all Sinai depends on tourism... what can you do?"

Nestled at the foot of Mount Sinai is St Catherine's Monastery, the dual jewel in the area's crown and a magnet for pilgrims and tourists of all nationalities. The oldest functioning monastery in the world (its origins date to 337 AD), St Catherine's — named after a 3rd century saint whose remains are said to have been transported to the Sinai by angels — is home to, arguably, the best collection of icons and manuscripts anywhere and to the burning bush from which God reputedly spoke to Moses.

But with ever-increasing hordes of tourists arriving each year, it is important to get the balance right between visitors' interests and the Greek Orthodox monks' religious life, said Father Justin, one of the monastery's 20 monks.

"It would be impossible not to have visitors, we have enough treasures and spiritual heritage to make the monastery a museum. It's a joy to share all these things with other people, but we need peace and quiet too. We have to strike a balance, we only open from 9-12 each day and are shut on Friday and Sunday."

The pace of change for the monks and Bedouins at St Catherine has been rapid. "Until the mid-1960s you had to travel across open desert to get here — it was only when Israel occupied the peninsula that roads and airports were built — there were very few visitors a year, and today around 50,000 people visit annually," explained Father Justin.

Far from shying away from the approaching 21st century and further change, the monastery is moving with the times while maintaining its firmly planted 4th century roots.

Plans are afoot to photograph the collection of manuscripts and icons, produce a CD-ROM and possibly have a Web-site on the Internet.

Over the years, the monastery's fame has brought in vital funds. Britain's Prince Charles set up the St Catherine's Foundation after he visited in 1995. An American branch of the foundation was launched by former US President George Bush earlier this year at the Glory of Byzantium exhibition in New York, where icons and a manuscript from the monastery were displayed.

The undisclosed amount of money from the Foundation has already paid for photographic equipment and future projects include the restoration of the ancient kitchen area in the eastern part of the monastery which is in ruins, using research by a British architectural conservationist.

More to see, more visitors, more publicity, more damage to the environment and spirituality of the area? Well, hopefully not.

It's here that the St Catherine Protectorate, now almost 10 years old, steps in.

Formally established by prime ministerial decree last year, and awarded funds from the European Union and the Egyptian government for a five-year project, the protectorate covers a 4,350km sq area around Mount Sinai and the monastery.

The aim is to preserve and develop the biological features of the park and conserve the archaeological and religious sites, explained John Grainger, the protectorate's manager, who was appointed last year.

"We need to maintain the integrity of the area, develop a waste management scheme and encourage a softer type of tourism, eco-tourism. It's a real challenge but progress is already being made," he said.

"We are working with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Authority, other authorities and particularly the Bedouins who are part and parcel of the area."

A park manager and four park rangers have been appointed to educate locals and tourists about conservation and 19 Bedouin community guards will assist them and report back on anything that's happening within the area.

Over the summer the guards, rangers and groups of British volunteers cleaned off graffiti from the mountains and cleared most accessible areas of rubbish.

"There have been improvements in the rubbish clearance. A system to bring down rubbish as required has been established with café owners and waste bins have been put on the mountain, surrounded by stone so that they blend in," said Grainger.

A survey of large mammals living within the area has been carried out and more wildlife will be introduced in the future. Rescue services for climbers in trouble were introduced during the summer and special 'environmentally-friendly' toilets for visitors are being developed.

The expansion of the town of St Catherine itself will be carefully managed by the protectorate and the government. A tourist levy may eventally be raised.

For some, the protectorate's action comes too late.

"I don't think making it into a park can restore the atmosphere of the place, it's already changed too much. The number of tourists will keep increasing. It no longer compares to how it was when I first visited in the late 1960s," said one Italian tourist on his 12th visit to St Catherine.

But as the visitor leaves the peace of the mountain and heads for the great hubbub of Cairo, the lasting impression is that the area is far from ruined. As Father Justin summed it up: "This is such a wonderful place, of course people want to visit. It's just a question of preserving what we have. Creating this protectorate should be of benefit to tourists, people living here and the environment of the area. I think it's a good idea."

Places to stay

IF YOU opt to sleep on the mountain you can leave extra baggage in the monastery's storeroom for LE2. Otherwise, there are various places at various prices to spend the night, the most convenient being the monastery's hostel. Beds in dorms costs LE35 a night, including dinner and breakfast. Call: (062) 770 945.

The St Catherine's Tourist Village, 500m from the monastery, offers more exclusive accommodation at more exclusive prices — a double costs $158. Call: (062) 770 456.

Further away, the Green Lodge costs LE21 for a dorm bed and provides transport for the 7km journey to the monastery. Camping is also allowed. Call (062) 770 314.

At a distance of 5km from the monastery, Morganland Village (Cairo — 02) 356 2437 has large rooms with showers. Half board costs $40 per person. Just next door is the Zeitouna Camp, (062) 771 409, which has reasonably-priced tents and stone huts.

A new 368-bed hotel, The Plaza, will open soon in town.

Getting there

WITH no train service in the Sinai, your journey will be by car, bus, service taxi or plane.

From Cairo it's about six hours and 450km by road. Cross to the Sinai and then head south to Tor before turning inland.

Bus schedules tend to vary. From Cairo a bus is time-tabled at 9am from the Sinai Terminal near the Ramses Hilton Hotel, LE35.

To leave St Catherine, buses and service taxis wait in the town centre by the restaurants. The bus to Cairo leaves at around mid-day and takes seven hours.

EgyptAir flies to St Catherine's airport which is 10km from the monastery. A one-way ticket from Cairo costs $109. Tours to the mountain and monastery are organised from Na'ama Bay, Nuweiba, Cairo and Hurghada.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.
Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners: LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: firsr class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.
http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CDs besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

New excavations in Luxor

SETI I's tomb in Luxor will be the subject of geological and environmental research sponsored by the Mubarak-Al Gore project, the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA).

The SCA has also granted permission to Kent Weeks to continue excavation in the tomb of Ramses II's sons, having taken several precautions to safeguard the site.

The SCA suspended excavation six months ago pending a geological study of the rock both inside and outside the tomb. The team will provide the SCA with periodical reports on the progress of the work.

Fatimid manuscripts found

A NUMBER of manuscripts and papyrus dating back to the Fatimid era (969-1171) was recently found by an Egyptian archaeologist at an ancient monastery in Fayoum.

The discovery was made during work at the monastery of the Arch Angel Michael in the province of Fayoum, 100km south of Cairo.

The manuscripts bear writing in the ornate Kufic-style Arabic script and deal with the sale and purchase of land.

Officials of the SCA announced that the new discovery shed light on trade relations in that era.

Several archaeological teams are working in Fayoum, which is rich in Pharaonic sites. Some of the latest discoveries include tombs, pots and fragments of decorated cloth.





photos: Ayman Ibrahim and Ahmed Abdel-Razeq



(left) Ahli's Ali Maher, who scored the first hat-trick in the league, struggling for the ball against El-Shams player. (right top & bottom) Zamalek and Mansoura and an unfulfilled avenging match



A shaky start

The premier league is only in its first week of the season, but even before last Friday's kick-off the game had been plagued by problems. First on the list is the furore created as the Cairo Stadium management, chaired by Azmy Kiratum, announced that due to stadium renovations starting in the second week of the league, Ahli's matches will be played at the Military Academy Stadium. Ahli's manager, Saleh Selim, has refused to agree to the decision and have his team play in a smaller capacity stadium, especially since Ahli has signed a contract with Cairo Stadium's management stipulating that the team's matches are to take place at that venue. Kiratum is at present still

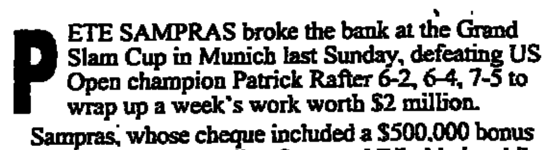
Marred by problems and lack of organisation, the 1997-98 premier league kicked off last Friday. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

insisting that the renovations take place in November and that Ahli should play at the Military Academy Stadium.

The second problem came about when the federation released the league's timetable of fixtures for only the first four weeks. The two power-house clubs, Ahli and Zamalek, together with other clubs including Mansoura and Moqaweloon, protested vociferously, arguing that as participants in several African and international championships that may interrupt the league, not knowing when their matches will be played will mean no time for rescheduling and result in complete chaos. Not only that, African and international championships interrupting the league last year caused an extension to the league season which went on for more than a year from August 1996 to September 1997. Federation officials promised to announce the rest of the schedule next week at the latest to avoid last season's delays.

Last Friday saw seven matches played simultaneously in the first week of the league. Baladiet El-Mahalla beat Minya 3-1, while Aswan beat Ghazl El-Mahalla 2-1, and Moqaweloon beat Ghazl El-Suez 1-0. Etihad Sakandary beat El-Masry 4-0, and Suez beat Etihad Osman 1-0. Ismaili gave an early warning to the other teams that they have entered the league to win, powering six goals into El-Canal's net. El-Canal succeeded in clinching only one goal. In their league debut, El-Shams was defeated by Ahli 4-1. El-Shams had been striving to play in the league, going on closed camps abroad and playing against African and European teams to hone their skills, and with a management offering the team counciling sessions with a sports psychologist, the team looks set to carry on unbowed by its defeat.

On Saturday, Zamalek and Mansoura played and drew 2-2. Last season Mansoura managed to upset Zamalek 4-1, and Zamalek fans were hoping their team would avenge their defeat this season. Already Zamalek officials are considering recruiting players from Ghana and dismissing some of their own. This depressed the local players which showed in their performance, increased by the atmosphere of blame rather than support from their fans that hung over the match. However, Zamalek's coach Rud Krol expressed his satisfaction with the team's performance.



PETE SAMPRAS broke the bank at the Grand Slam Cup in Munich last Sunday, defeating US Open champion Patrick Rafter 6-2, 6-4, 7-5 to wrap up a week's work worth $2 million.

Sampras, whose cheque included a $500,000 bonus for winning the Australian Open and Wimbledon, hiked his total prize money so far this year to nearly $7.4 million. The American star continued his career-long domination of his Australian opponent in the one-hour 35-minute contest at the Olympiahalle, victory coming less than 24 hours after Sampras ousted British number one Greg Rusedski in the semi-finals. Rafter earned his place in the championship match by overpowering the Czech star Petr Korda in five draining sets lasting more than four hours.

"I played extremely well today," said Sampras. "I think Patrick was tired from his semi-final. But he's a great player and has improved a lot this year. He'll be around for a lot of years."

The Munich match was the first time two Grand Slam champions have met in the final of the 6 million dollar 16-man event, which was being contested for the eighth time. "He was just too good again for me today," said Rafter. "It's been like that for the last seven or eight times and it's getting boring. Pete showed why he's so far ahead of everyone else, maybe some day he'll go off the boil and I'll have a chance."

In the women's competition, world number two Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic won the $450,000 WTA Tour tournament, beating the diminutive South African Amanda Coetzer 6-2, 4-6, 6-3. Coetzer, ranked six in the world, fought valiantly with a string of passing shots and lobs as both women hurtled round the court. However, Novotna was fastest off the blocks, breaking Coetzer right at the start and steaming through the opening set as the South African failed to reach the heights of her semi-final win over world number one Martina Hingis, only the latter's third defeat of the entire season. "This is my biggest win of the year," Novotna said.

Perhaps the tournament's biggest surprise was Coetzer's 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 upset of Hingis, winner of three Grand Slam titles. "I'm not a machine — it rarely happens to me that there's an opponent across the net who can play me even," said Hingis of her three-set loss. *(photo: Reuters)*



Squash weathers the storm

Having weathered a last minute change of venue, Egypt's International Squash Championship is set to start — indoors

The countdown to Egypt's International Squash Championship has begun, with only eight days to go before the event opens in Alexandria Stadium, writes **Eman Abdel-Moeti**. But until this week, the venue was to be the famed glass court where two Al-Ahram Squash Championships were previously played out in front of the Pyramids, this time set up in the tranquil El-Montazah Gardens at the eastern end of Alexandria. However, wary of the Alexandrian October rains, the Egyptian Squash Federation decided at the last minute to play safe and keep the competition indoors. And the final prize money figure was also hanging in the balance until a few days ago, when donations from squash fans and businessmen brought the total to $100,000. The winner, widely tippped to be either Jansher Khan or Peter Nicol who have met in the finals of several championships lately, will receive $17,500. The runner-up prize has been set at $11,500, while third and fourth places will receive $7,000 each.

This will be the first time a squash championship has been held outside Cairo, and the Federation hope that the coastal city will not only lend a different aura to the event but attract tourists to the competition.

The Egyptian star Ahmed Barada, ranked six in the world, Amir Wagih ranked 21, and Omar El-Brollossy, ranked 24, are all in the main draw. Six-time World Champion Jansher Khan, perhaps to the chagrin of many participants, also has his name on the list. Khan loves Egypt, and he seizes every opportunity to participate in any of its squash events. "I feel at home when I come to Egypt because the people cheer me here as much as my own people," said Khan on one of his visits to Egypt.

Peter Nicol, now ranked two in the world, who beat Khan in the final of the second Al-Ahram Squash Championship and was cheered enthusiastically by the Egyptian crowd for his extraordinary perseverance in the face of the mighty world champion, will also be playing. Perhaps the warmth he has felt from the Egyptian fans is why Nicol has confirmed his participation in Egypt's International Championship more than once. Australian Rodney Eyles, who dropped from two to three in the world after being defeated twice by Ahmed Barada in Egypt, is still determined to come back for a third time to seek revenge.

An ironic twist of fate has put Ahmed Barada and Amir Wagih, Barada's one-time coach, in the second round. Both players, who are very much loved by the Egyptians, have faced this awkward situation before in other tournaments. The meeting is expected to be very tense, as their fans usually become very heated and violence has been known to break out in the stands. However, as both players have said on many occasions, they have great respect for each other and do not let themselves be swayed by the displays of emotion among the spectators.

Whoever wins this all-Egyptian scenario will make it to the quarter-finals, where he will no doubt face Jansher Khan in the following match. Barada may not be on top form this tournament as he suffered a back injury that prevented him from entering the Hong Kong Open earlier this month, but whatever happens, fans will no doubt be treated to some of the finest and most nail-biting games the sport has to offer.

Encouraging women's football

Michelle Akers, 31, the world's best woman player and top scorer, was in Alexandria for the Under-17 World Championship. She spoke to Abeer Anwar

With her USA women's team, Akers won the FIFA World Champion title in 1991. In the '95 World Cup in Sweden, she starred with her team. In the Olympic Games in Atlanta '96, her team won the gold medal.

Akers is the top goal scorer among both men and women in the US national football teams. "Since I started participating in official competitions, I have scored over 100 goals," she said.

Akers started playing football at the age of eight. "As a little girl, I loved sports in general and I used to play many sports with both boys and girls but football was my favourite. I had the most fun with it and loved it." With the encouragement of her parents, Akers invested herself in the game and it became her best sport.

To Akers, football is not only a sport, it is her job as well. "I am a professional football player. This is my job." Akers coaches many clubs in the US, apart from being the captain of the US national women's team.

Once a professional in her country, Akers decided to move to Sweden at the beginning of the '90s to improve her game further because in the US, "we do not have a good professional league to play for in the USA. Our national team is the only way to improve." Akers played professionally for three years there before she decided to return to her home just before the '95 World Cup. "I wanted to play with my national team," she explained.

Akers added that she does not have much time to play professional football in a club. "Our schedule is so heavy. We are preparing for the '99 World Cup to take place in the USA and then the Sydney Olympics in the year 2000," she said.

The top US scorer, Akers explained that she trains with the US men's juniors teams. "I also train with professional men's teams in clubs in my area. Whoever is around, I train with."

At the beginning of September, Akers came to Alexandria to visit her friends and watch some of the Group C matches in which the US team played. "I have also come to encourage Egyptian women's football team. I know it is very hard for Egyptian women to practice football," she said and went on to add: "They have to keep playing football and fight for their rights. They should not give up. Be patient and one day you will be a known team."

Akers said that she is willing to come back to Egypt and give training sessions to coaches in order to teach them how to train women. "I will always encourage them. We are also ready as a national team to come and train with them and play some matches in Egypt," Akers concluded.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



photo: Randa Sheath

Sherif Mohieddin:

Rose gardens? Never. Not for the man, the life or the work

No bed of roses

In 1989, the London press — they had a proper one then — wrote of a new and exciting festival in Cairo at the Citadel, presented by a young conductor of 25, Sherif Mohieddin. The programme included some of the greatest new work of the 20th century. Three years later, in 1992, he founded the Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra, which has now become one of the fresh-water springs in the oasis of the Cairo music scene.

Sherif Mohieddin, from his earliest years, has always exuded that certain quality they now call charisma and which, in other times, was called personality. He seemed to be a youthful comet. Comets zoom up into the sky, flash about a bit, then zoom back into the darkness from which they came.

Sherif is no comet. He sticks around and shines reliably and, with certain other mates and shiners, helps to illumine the Cairo vortex. He is a star. Stars stay put, they even belong in particular places. Cairo has captured a new one of her own in Sherif. But the future may be difficult for him because the capacious bosom of Cairo is none too hospitable to stars — her own or anyone else's. She likes cutting everything down to a certain size, and Mohieddin does not fit into this sort of picture. Cairo will have to adjust to a new shape, or there will be explosions. These can be fun and the results may hopefully bring about a new angle from which to view music here. The old classical corsetting is falling to pieces, and Mohieddin is just the one to profit by it.

His appearance: it has to be adjusted to. There's nothing soft-edged or diplomatic about it. He is handsome, but it does not seem to matter to him. He is like the doctor in *The Three Sisters*; he looks as if he is someone with a flair for rhetoric, but he is not. He is quiet, but it is a seismic peace which can burst open at any time. It seldom seems to, but the tension is there: he merely shines darkly.

He does not talk much. He can scream, though. So can all conductors: it is a part of their travel equipment, and basically useful. But the easy-going Egyptian attitude to music is not his favourite state. Too much of it and the Mohieddin decibels begin to mount fortissimo.

He is 33 years old now, Cairo born and bred. He comes from a memorable family. His father, very famous, a ceramicist, and his mother an economist. He is the only son, but there are two striking sisters and one, Manal the harpist, is a true sibyl. Her strength derives from a great musical spirit and is astounding. Her playing is wilful, wild, unshackled. She raises the misunderstood instrument, the harp, to unique heights.

The family is centred in a vast mansion near the Pyramids. It is like a Balkan castle, and these lofty people stride about it like mountain folk, free-roving, unfettered by conventions or ordinary discipline. Their talents are the only restrictions they obey. They seem to be extremely Egyptian, yet the particular colour they lend to life is a strange mixture, a palimpsest of various grafts, one upon another, which maybe makes them ultra-Egyptian.

This shows vividly in Sherif. He is Egyptian and something else. So is his life, his outlook, and his musical compositions. He says: "You do the talking, I'll do the music. Don't make me up; don't invent me."

There is no need to. He operates, like him or not ("there are plenty who don't," he smiles), as a phenomenon. He has a gift of making the most trivial, everyday thing — eating, picking up the telephone, merely sitting down (which he hardly ever does) — into unique actions. This gift is the "strangeness of being" most musicians possess — after all, they deal in the non-existent.

He must have been an odd child. Things burst into action around, but he was neither the instigator nor the victim. At 12 years of age, an accident happened to him which could have turned many a child into a victim. While helping his father in the ceramics studio, a big weight, a presser, crushed the fingers of his right hand, and so four fingers were amputated. One receives a very laconic description of this awful scene. "Well, they're gone; no use being tragic. The disaster was a new challenge, an event on the path. It actually toughened me, did me good."

He was always musical. Three years after the finger incident, he began to study at the Cairo Conservatoire with Professor Henry Kerka, a Yugoslav, the horn. At this he holds up his two hands. "You see," he says, "you play the horn with the fingers of the left hand. The right is a space keeping it on the level. Life comes first, then the results."

The results soon followed. Two years later, at 15, he was found by Gamal Abdel-Rehim to have a gift for composing music. And so, as luck had it, he fell into the stream of musical thought. This remarkable man, Abdel-Rehim, and his wife, Samha El-Kholi, were able to provide. Abdel-Rehim is a great composer who revealed things but did not teach, and she, formidably gifted as a muse, helped Sherif to make use of musical academia and its formalising techniques without becoming a part of it. They gave him the classics and then, what would stay with him, the living 20th century. It is this which now keeps him firmly at the front of the musical scene here. Mistakes he may make, grumble they do as always, but his roots are firm and the empty space of the missing four fingers is a very active activity.

In 1984, while still a student at the Conservatoire, he was given a scholarship to study composition at Wurzburg for a year with Berthold Hummel and the horn with Professor Langestein.

Later, he joined the Cairo Symphony Orchestra. This time his compositions began to be played publicly; in 1987 he graduated from the Cairo Conservatoire as composer and horn player and was appointed to the teaching staff.

Things were moving for him. He opened the new Opera House with a *Fanfare* he composed specially and, in 1988, became the director of the newly opened Summer Music Festival at the Citadel, a position he still holds. Later, the festival was moved to the front of the Citadel, away from the mosque. The new position is vast, dramatic, but a wind tunnel. You hear the wind, and not much else. Sherif is not thrown: "We'll change it," he says. He will need all his laconicism to change the gale that blows up there on the mountain and our hopes go with him because the site is a world beater.

Fingers signify for Sherif Mohieddin. He lost a few some years ago, but one must take a look at all the fingers he has grown since. He is all fingers, with each one in a different pie.

Sherif is fun. He was driving a car around Cairo before he was 14, without a licence. At 16, he was a daily habitué of the mesmeric Café Riche on Qasr El-Nil. Maybe he can resurrect the place from the ashpile it has become and make it over once again into the elegant hang-out it used to be. He has the fingers for it.

He also has a few fingers from France, where he has recently worked with Dominique Rouits, the visionary conductor of the Opéra de Massy in Paris, from which he took his Diplôme Supérieur. Apart from his home-based concerts in Cairo and Alexandria, his conducting routine now takes him regularly to France and Germany. He is at present conductor-in-chief of the Cairo Opera Orchestra, the Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra, and the Cairo Chamber Orchestra, which he created and which travels to most of the cities and towns of Egypt as a "road group."

Sherif goes on. He has worked on a series now called Music for All, concerts given on the last Friday of every month, mostly in the Small Hall of the Opera House. These are matinées beginning at 2pm. The tickets are bargain-priced and you can come dressed as you please. This small crack which Mohieddin has opened might loosen up the solid wall of convention which does really restrict the opera here. Time will show the results. The programmes are really interesting — mod, classical and far out, with artists of international standing, both visiting and Egyptian. But who goes to a concert at 2pm? the small voice of practicality chirps. These Music for All concerts are the most interesting development Cairo's music scene has had in years and they deserve an active response.

In 1990, Sherif married the opera singer Nevine Allouba. She already had a flourishing career of her own, so wife and mother seemed almost subsidiary adventures. Two such strong active personalities stepping into the Egyptian marriage ring suggested to onlookers too many sparks flying to keep the marriage for long. Going against the grain of opinion, they have become a strong team, a binary couple, two beats to the bar, with two young sons as grace notes.

People in the music world of Cairo — the likes of Mustafa Nagi and Dr Awatef Abdel-Karim — have high hopes for his future development. He stands at the gate of a possibly exciting enterprise — to take Cairo's music into the next century, into the world outside of Egypt where values are totally different from those at home, while keeping Egypt's own strange and unique values intact. He needs all the extra fingers he can muster, as well as his own laid-back confidence, to offer his own personal answer to the problems.

For example, he wrote *Three Operas in One Hour*, taken from a short story by Youssef Idris, which met with a mixed reception. The Cairo grumble crowd did not like it. It was a young beginning to some interesting ideas he has. Opera cannot go on being Puccini forever. He remains the same, but the audience, if there is one, does not. *Three Operas* was an effort to find out what there really is out there with those millions. "What can they do about Cairo?". Sherif's compositions offer some sort of answer to the questions even Turandot had not thought of.

Cairo is every musician's problem. As John Cage would say, it has become its own music. All Cairo was born under a bus. Cairo manages miraculously, and so must her musicians come to terms with the impossible, musically at least. It is worth a try and Sherif is doing his best.

He has created the new Camera Opera of Cairo, an effort to enlarge the operatic repertoire here. And they begin with *Don Pasquale*, the comic masterpiece of Donizetti, with Sherif as conductor of his Akhnaton Orchestra.

He says the speed at which music is moving now opens doors to bewildering new areas. Who calls the tune makes the music. Questions fly. Is Oracle as good as Microsoft, and do they make music together in a new space of their own? Objects have a new impact on music as never before in history. In object-orientated technology, will composers really be necessary? Sherif grins. Can Cairo offer him space enough to work in the non-existent wonder world of music?

Profile by **David Blake**

